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Timothy Evans Buttram

*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

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"SWALLOWING MEXICO WITHOUT ANY GREASE":  
THE ABSENCE OF CONTROVERSY OVER THE FEASIBILITY OF ANNEXING ALL  
MEXICO, 1847-1848

BY

TIMOTHY EVANS BUTTRAM  
BA, University of New Hampshire, 2002

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
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in

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vi

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION .....	1
I. THE FEASIBILITY OF ANNEXING MEXICO IN CONGRESSIONAL DIALOGUE DURING THE LAST MONTHS OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR .....	10
President Polk's Message to Congress .....	14
Senator Cass' Ten Regiment Bill .....	24
The Debate over the Value of Annexation .....	29
Conclusion .....	37
II. PERCEPTIONS OF MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES IN AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS DURING THE OCCUPATION, 1847-1848 .....	40
American Fortitude .....	44
Domination over Mexico .....	49
American Superiority .....	54
Conclusion .....	61
III. AMERICAN SOLDIERS' PERCEPTIONS AND THE OCCUPATION OF MEXICO .....	65
Logistics .....	68
The Mexican Response to Occupation .....	73

American Conduct .....	79
Resistance .....	85
American Superiority .....	90
Disease .....	94
Conclusion .....	97
IV. CONCLUSION .....	102
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	104

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1: Map of Mexican Territorial Losses to the United States .....	8
2: 1847 Map of Mexican States .....	9
3: List of Battles and Resulting American and Mexican Casualties .....	64
4: American Military Operations in Mexico, 1846-1847 .....	100
5: Route of General Scott's Advance along the <i>Camino Real</i> .....	101

ABSTRACT

"SWALLOWING MEXICO WITHOUT ANY GREASE":  
THE ABSENCE OF CONTROVERSY OVER THE FEASIBILITY OF ANNEXING ALL  
MEXICO, 1847-1848

by

Timothy Evans Buttram

University of New Hampshire, May, 2008

Advisor: Cynthia J. Van Zandt, Associate Professor of History

This study contributes to the historiography of the "all Mexico" movement by showing that America's ability to annex its southern neighbor was never a part of the all Mexico debate. The thesis argues that common American perceptions of the United States and Mexico during the Mexican-American War undermined any grounds on which to challenge the achievability of annexation. Chapter I shows that no politician, regardless of his stance on the value of absorbing Mexico, questioned the feasibility of doing so. Chapter II then demonstrates that portrayals of the United States and Mexico in American newspapers supported confidence in the American ability to dominate its enemy. Finally, chapter III reveals that even American soldiers who came face to face with the realities of the occupation held similar perceptions and shared the common confidence in American capability.



## INTRODUCTION

Shortly after arriving in Tampico in late January 1847, two months after the city had fallen into American hands, Captain Robert Anderson was told an extraordinary story over dinner. He related it in a letter to his wife, "An old Mexican about ninety, when [the American flag] was raised, observed to a man standing near him: '...That flag has been my ruin. I came from Spain, and I was then young, and was sent into Louisiana; that flag came and I then went into Florida; in a few years the same flag came, and I then came to this place expecting never to be disturbed by it again. But there it is—the same flag, the same people.'"<sup>1</sup>

The flag came down when the Mexican-American War ended, but many Americans had urged that it should not. In the 1840's Manifest Destiny was on the march. Before the conflict, President Polk depicted American expansionism as potentially limitless. He set a precedent by stating that if war came with Britain over the Oregon territory, American efforts could only be compensated by the domination of all of Canada.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, although without President Polk's express approval, the drawn-out war with Mexico led many to seek more than the initial territorial goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Anderson, *An Artillery Officer in the Mexican War, 1846-7* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911), 21-2.

<sup>2</sup> "The President's Annual Message," *Niles' National Register* vol. 69, no. 1,784 (6 December 1845).

By late 1847, citing reasons of philanthropy, pragmatism, and destiny, various Congressmen and activists composed a substantial movement to annex all of Mexico.

This so-called "all Mexico" movement is at best treated as a novel and unusual episode in the historiography of the Mexican-American War. Historians have written little on the issue, favoring broader political and military themes and a wide array of social and cultural topics. The few who have dedicated articles to the movement have focused on which politicians supported or opposed annexation, and why. Edward G. Bourne was the first historian to seriously delve into the topic with "The Proposed Absorption of Mexico, 1847-48," but his work suffers from dated conclusions and a narrow perspective.<sup>3</sup> The next major work in the historiography is also the most comprehensive. "The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico," a monograph-length account by Joseph D. P. Fuller, traces the political support for and opposition to the movement from start to finish.<sup>4</sup> Other texts feature discussion of the movement but

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<sup>3</sup> The piece was read at the December 1899 meeting of the American Historical Association in response to issues being raised in the Spanish American War. His research question asked why the United States did *not* absorb Mexico after conquering it, and was based on the assumption that the United States was naturally inclined toward expansion. Edward G. Bourne, "The Proposed Absorption of Mexico, 1847-48," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1899* vol. 1 (1899): 157-169.

<sup>4</sup> Fuller's decision to write "The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico" was prompted by one of his own articles, "The Slavery Question and the Movement to Acquire Mexico, 1846-1848." The latter text's thesis refutes Bourne's claim that pro-slavery politicians backed the movement when it was at its strongest, and features prominently in Fuller's monograph-length piece. John D. P. Fuller, "The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico," *The John Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science* vol. 54, no. 1 (1936): 1-176; John D. P. Fuller, "The Slavery Question and the Movement to

are not exclusively devoted to it.<sup>5</sup> The only author who provides a glimpse of opinion outside of Washington is John C. Pinheiro, who discusses activists as well as politicians when analyzing the functions of anti-Catholicism in "'Religion without Restriction': Anti-Catholicism, All Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo."<sup>6</sup>

While most historians have treated the movement to annex Mexico as a subject of intense political controversy, none besides Pinheiro have drawn attention to factors on which all agreed. One such uncontroversial factor was the feasibility of annexing Mexico, defining annexation strictly as permanent control and administration over Mexico. Interestingly, America's ability to accomplish such a monumental task was not a part of the debate.

There is ample reason to challenge America's capacity to annex its neighbor in 1848. Although the United States took half of Mexico's territory

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Acquire Mexico, 1846-1848," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* vol. 21, no. 1 (June 1934): 31-48.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Merk notably dedicates several chapters to the subject in his landmark, controversial book on Manifest Destiny. He, too, focuses on politicians' reasons for support and opposition, in order to prove that the movement's collapse occurred because of Manifest Destiny's closer ties to liberal ideology than to expansionism. David Pletcher also describes all Mexico in *The Diplomacy of Annexation* as one of several major instances of expansionist sentiment. However neither author treat the movement with the degree of depth that John Fuller does. Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 107-201; David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> John Pinheiro focuses particularly on the role of anti-Catholicism in popular support and opposition of annexation. He finds that both sides used rhetoric of American superiority. John C. Pinheiro, "'Religion without Restriction': Anti-Catholicism, All Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo." *Journal of the Early Republic* vol. 23 (2003): 69-96.

at the end of the war, it only absorbed a fraction of its population.<sup>7</sup> Taking the entire country would entail establishing control over a vast, culturally alien population. Erasing the border might be a simple matter of decree, but as a consequence the United States would have been faced with a massive imperial responsibility. What obstacles would arise, one can only speculate, but they might well have prevented the United States from retaining its grip on Mexico. However, during this time of seemingly boundless opportunity, Americans did not see the situation that way.

Contemporary perceptions of the United States and Mexico undermined the grounds on which to contest the feasibility of annexation. Americans were imbued with a sense of superiority over their southern neighbor and a strong conviction of their own country's abilities. Many saw Mexico as a corrupt state populated by a poor, apathetic race who readily submitted to any authority, and many viewed the United States as a superior country whose civilized, spirited people could achieve great feats and overcome almost any obstacle.

The primary purpose of the first chapter is to demonstrate that no politician seriously challenged the achievability of annexing Mexico. In rough chronological order, it follows the President's and Senators' attitudes on how best to resolve the war, at a time when prospects for peace were at their most distant. This was during the first session of the

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<sup>7</sup> See Figures 1 & 2 on pages 8 & 9, respectively.

Thirtieth Congress, the period when the all Mexico movement had the most political momentum. The chapter also begins to identify politicians' perceptions of Mexico and the United States, which helped make annexation seem achievable.

The second chapter explores the common ways that Mexico and the United States were portrayed by near the end of the war. Contemporary newspapers were politically partial and often elaborated the stances of the parties they supported. They are useful sources for fleshing out the perceptions initially identified in the first chapter. The articles in these periodicals also contained many common themes which both reflected and influenced ideas in American society. They led to the conclusions that Mexico was innocuous and that the United States was superior. People who accepted these themes had good reason to be confident in America's ability to annex Mexico.

Chapter Three examines the prolific writings of American soldiers who lived through the realities of the occupation. Despite often being confronted with forceful evidence to the contrary, men on the frontline incorporated into their writings many of the same themes that appeared in periodicals and political speeches. They applied notions of Mexican inferiority and American dominance to depict the occupation as a spectacular success, once again giving no reason to question America's ability to keep what it had conquered.

Examining the absence of controversy over America's ability to absorb Mexico is significant for several reasons. First, it fills a gap in the historiography of the all Mexico movement. Historians like Edward Bourne and John Fuller have focused on the reasons behind the movement's growth and decline, and on the political motives to support or oppose annexation. This thesis delves deeper into the arguments that politicians used, highlights one potential controversy that was noticeably missing from the debate, and offers an explanation for its absence.

Second, this thesis follows John Pinheiro's lead in casting a new light on the all Mexico movement. The annexation of Mexico was an extremely divisive issue in its time, and past historical works accurately reflect this. However, on certain facets of the issue, there was an undercurrent of consensus. This paper emphasizes one such aspect on which politicians agreed, rather than disagreed. It shows that the debate was limited to the value and consequences of annexation.

Third, further exploring the all Mexico movement contributes to a better understanding of Manifest Destiny. Today, the term is treated as much more than a slogan or identifier of policy.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have begun unpacking the factors that comprised what is now considered the cultural

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<sup>8</sup> Manifest Destiny was first coined in 1845 by journalist John L. O'Sullivan to describe America's mission in North America, but Alfred Weinberg was the first to use the term to define a 19<sup>th</sup> century American ideology. He describes it as a creed popular with many Americans, which deftly combined an understanding of American culture and values with a sense of high purpose. Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1935).

concept of Manifest Destiny.<sup>9</sup> Towards this end, analysis of the all Mexico movement is quite relevant. Those who were for annexation expressed ideas of expansionism, opportunity, westward momentum, Anglo-Saxonism, and even philanthropy, all of which were important components of Manifest Destiny.

The perceptions that deterred politicians from earnestly disputing the feasibility of annexation also reflected key components of Manifest Destiny. Ideas of Mexican inferiority and American superiority demonstrated racism, Anglo-Saxonism, and a general confidence in American capability. Whether they supported the movement or not, Americans conceded the imperturbability of American expansion, as encapsulated in the term *destiny*. The confidence that was intrinsic to the ideology of Manifest Destiny left little doubt in the minds of Americans that the United States could annex Mexico.

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<sup>9</sup> Frederick Merk challenged Weinberg's thesis in the book *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*, which described Manifest Destiny as rooted less in expansionism than in new world idealism. He cited philanthropy as a main reason for the ideology's popularity. Amy S. Greenberg and Reginald Horsman, respectively, point out that rhetoric of masculinity and Anglo-Saxonism also helped construct the concept and make it ring true. Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*; Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origin of American Racial Anglo-Saxons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

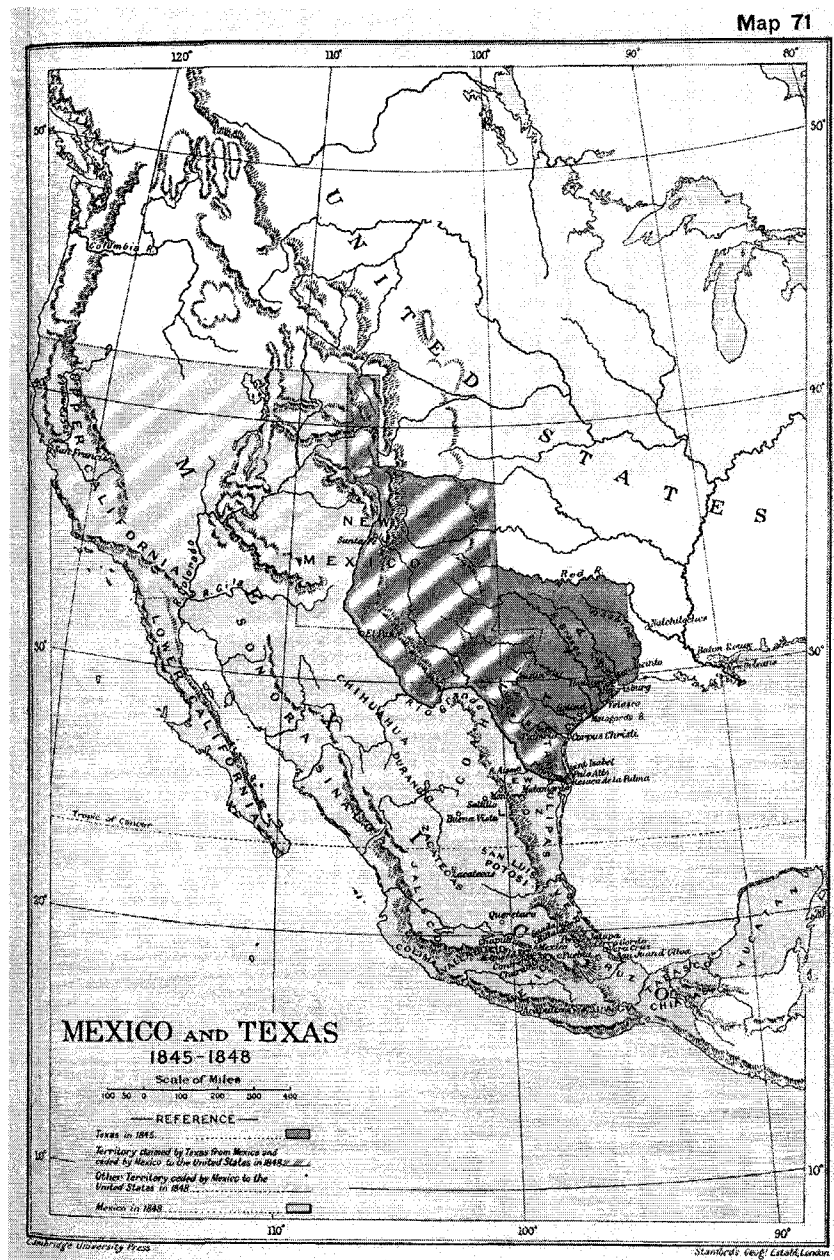


FIGURE 1:

This map shows the United States expanding at Mexico's expense. The dark area is Texas, annexed in 1845 to the Nueces River. In dark stripes is land that had been claimed by both Texas and Mexico. This dispute was resolved with the signing of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ceded this territory and the land in light stripes to the United States.

Sir Adolphus William Ward, G.W. Prothero, Sir Stanley Mordaunt Leathes, and E.A. Benians eds., *The Cambridge Modern History Atlas* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 71. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.





FIGURE 2:

Despite sustaining the massive territorial losses depicted in Figure 1, Mexico retained the majority of its population within its borders after the war. In the absence of exact demographic data, this 1847 map of Mexican states roughly demonstrates population density through the size of each administrative region. Denser areas required tighter administration, while sparser regions could afford to be less centralized. The size of Alta California is dramatic in relation to states south of the Rio Grande, emphasizing the location of Mexico's population core. As a note of interest, this American-made map was used in preparing the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and appended to the treaty itself.

J. Disturnell, "Mapa de los Estados Unidos de Méjico," *General Records of the U.S. Government*, RG11.

## CHAPTER I

### THE FEASIBILITY OF ANNEXING MEXICO IN CONGRESSIONAL DIALOGUE DURING THE LAST MONTHS OF THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

When the 30<sup>th</sup> Congress assembled in December 1847, the United States was facing a dilemma. The Mexican-American War had progressed into its second year, but despite spectacular American battlefield victories, peace remained elusive. The remnants of the central Mexican government seemed to Senator Lewis Cass to evoke a "national obstinacy," refusing to yield even when its armies and cities had fallen.<sup>10</sup> With a treaty nowhere in sight, the president and the legislature were faced with a decision that not only would affect the way the war would be carried on, but might drastically alter the course of the country. According to Senator John Calhoun, "I believe the pressing question at this moment is, whether we shall conquer Mexico, and hold her as a subjected province, or incorporate her into our union."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *The Congressional Globe*, 30<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. vol. 17 (Washington D.C.: Blair and Rives, 1848), 114. Historian Gene Brack makes a compelling argument that Mexicans deeply feared the combination of American racism and expansionism. Thus they remained reluctant to agree to a treaty surrendering land, even after their country was occupied, as it might be the first step down a slippery slope. Gene M. Brack, "Mexican Opinion, American Racism, and the War of 1846," *The Western Historical Quarterly* vol. 1, no. 2 (April 1970), 167.

<sup>11</sup> *Congressional Globe* 53.

Two years earlier that question was far from most people's thoughts. The Mexican-American War had not been intended to be a war of total conquest. It had begun over a territorial dispute in southern Texas, and although many Americans favored capitalizing on the conflict by seizing valuable Mexican provinces, only a handful of ultra-expansionists advocated solving the dispute by eliminating the country of Mexico altogether.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, even limited territorial objectives were subject to intense debate in Congress, where Whigs criticized the legitimacy of demanding land for a war that they believed was unjust, and the issue of whether or not to allow slavery loomed over any potential territorial cessions. In Washington, the prospect of absorbing the whole country of Mexico was out of the question.<sup>13</sup>

Yet as the war drew on, public sentiment for absorbing Mexico grew. Washington politicians repeatedly disavowed any intention of deliberately pursuing annexation, but the drawn-out occupation of

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<sup>12</sup> "Our true policy is, to go on in strengthening the Union—carrying out the annexation policy—to drop all small questions, and boldly grasp the larger one. In fact, to annex the whole of Mexico, instead of California—to merge the two republics into one, instead of taking a slice for breakfast to-day and another for dinner to-morrow. We shall be compelled to do this... as a means of protection of our free and happy institutions." This extreme sentiment only appears in *The New York Herald* before the war. "Foreign Interference-Annexation the True Policy of America," *The New York Herald*, 20 January 1846, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Politicians only began to seriously consider annexation when several situations converged at the end of 1847. Public calls for annexation were becoming louder and more difficult to ignore. Also, the debate over slavery in new territory had lost urgency, potentially reducing the friction caused by land acquisitions. Most importantly, the latest treaty negotiations had failed and peace with Mexico appeared to be nowhere in sight. Fuller, "The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico," 104.

Mexico was looking increasingly like it could be resolved in no other way.<sup>14</sup> Those who supported sustaining the American military presence, including the President and many Democratic senators, argued that the occupying forces, if properly supplied, could carry on indefinitely and even establish a level of jurisdiction over the country. Some senators went further and expounded on the benefits of annexing Mexico in case it did occur, already convinced that the deed was achievable. Meanwhile, many Whigs and several Democrats headed by Senator Calhoun passionately opposed eliminating the country of Mexico or pursuing any path that would lead to that result.

Tellingly, though, politicians rarely questioned America's ability to accomplish such a mammoth task. Instead, they described Mexico as undesirable or innocuous, deeply undermining the notion that Mexicans could or would mount any effective resistance. By contrast, the United States was depicted as a powerful belligerent that held the fate of Mexico in its hands. The ways that the United States and Mexico were portrayed in debates over how to further prosecute the war offered no serious reason to doubt America's ability to annex Mexico.

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<sup>14</sup> Senator Cass insisted, "There is no man in this nation in favor of the extinction of the nationality of Mexico." *Congressional Globe* 54. Senator Niles believed "it to be the general sentiment of this body that the conquest of this extensive country is not desired." *Congressional Globe* 55. Yet Senators Calhoun, Clayton, Pearce, Mangum, Butler, Cass, and Clarke, among others, all agreed that annexation was a potential consequence of pursuing a policy of occupation, for better or for worse. *Congressional Globe* 79, 151, 177, 183, 188, 216, 244.

This chapter traces the discussion of annexation's feasibility in Washington, defining annexation strictly as interminable domination.<sup>15</sup> The absence of serious challenges to the controversial plan's feasibility reveals a notable instance of skewed worldview that was firmly entrenched in American politicians' minds. These perceptions reflected the confidence that was key to the contemporary cultural concept of Manifest Destiny.

The Thirtieth Congress, before the passage of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, when peace was nowhere in sight, witnessed some of the most intense debates over America's prospects in Mexico. The first section analyzes the President's views, principally through his December 7 message to Congress. The remainder of the essay follows, in roughly chronological order, the Senate dialogue over the further prosecution of the war. War-related debates in the Whig-dominated House of Representatives still dwelled on the two-year-old just war issue, revealing relatively little about Representatives' perspectives on the feasibility of Mexico's annexation.<sup>16</sup> Senators, by comparison, give considerably more insight in their debates over the Ten-Regiment Bill and Senator Calhoun's

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<sup>15</sup> Whether or not Mexico could be incorporated into the Union was by contrast a subject of great controversy. However, there is no evidence of doubt that the country could be dominated.

<sup>16</sup> For a summary of the significance of the House of Representatives in the all Mexico movement, see Bourne, "The Proposed Absorption of Mexico," 169, and Fuller, "The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico," 99-100. Bourne believes that Whig domination of the House was a key reason why Mexican sovereignty was preserved, but the record does not support this argument. Fuller notes that the House was unable to mount a unified, restraining stance on foreign policy.

resolution to avoid annexation. Admittedly politicians' words will not always match their beliefs, but overall their messages and debates are accessible documents that provide some indication of their views.<sup>17</sup>

### **President Polk's Message to Congress**

When the legislature convened in December 1847, President Polk issued to Congress an annual message that outlined his stance on the direction of policy over the next few months. Despite Mexico's continuing refusal to accept the original American terms, Polk urged that territorial concessions were the only viable form of indemnity Mexicans could offer for a war in which, he insisted, they were the aggressors.<sup>18</sup> He had been elected on the promise of adding territory to the Union, and he was not about to change his stance now that American troops controlled Mexico City. However, in this annual address, Polk also felt compelled to clarify that his territorial objectives were limited; he had no designs to absorb Mexico entirely.<sup>19</sup> He made no mention of any pragmatic concerns for

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<sup>17</sup> The legislative debates of the mid-nineteenth century were documented in the *Congressional Globe*, an independently published series sponsored by the government and tasked with accurately recording Congressional proceedings. Although occasionally the perspective shifts from first person to third person, the debates of the Thirtieth Congress were mostly transcribed verbatim. The reporting is detailed enough to deliver an accurate account of the debates.

<sup>18</sup> Senate Executive Document 1, *Message from the President of the United States*, 30<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1847, 8.

<sup>19</sup> "It has never been contemplated by me, as an object of the war, to make a permanent conquest of the republic of Mexico, or to annihilate her separate existence as an independent nation." Sen. Exec. Doc 14. Fuller accurately notes that this was the first time annexation had been explicitly addressed in Polk's annual messages, indicating

the consequences of such a bold move, only saying that he had adopted the position because the United States "have always desired to be on terms of amity and good neighborhood with her [Mexico]."<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, Polk's resolutions on how the war should be prosecuted in the coming months did not render annexation out of the question. Though he may have wished to avoid absorbing Mexico, the suggestions and opinions expressed in his annual message did not give cause to doubt annexation's achievability.

President Polk promoted two paths toward peace in his address, which effectively amounted to the carrot and the stick. One option was to use America's control over the country to force reform upon the allegedly corrupt Mexican republic. Polk sympathized with "the peaceable and well disposed inhabitants of Mexico" who wanted peace but feared political reprisal for speaking out.<sup>21</sup> Eliminating military tyranny and factionalism by establishing and enforcing a stable republican government might encourage Mexicans finally to accept a treaty. But if after this Mexico still remained obstinate, Polk ominously warned Congress, "then we shall have exhausted all honorable means in pursuit of peace, and must continue to occupy her country with our troops, taking the full

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the momentum that the all Mexico movement had gained in 1847. Fuller, "The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico," 98.

<sup>20</sup> Sen. Exec. Doc. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Sen. Exec. Doc. 15.

measure of indemnity into our hands, and must enforce the terms which our honor demands."<sup>22</sup>

The second option, construed above as a last resort, was to coerce the Mexican people into accepting a peace by making them more acutely experience the stresses of war. Mexican resolve had exasperated the President. At the outset of the war, President Polk asserted, it had been a point of pride for the United States to make every effort to be generous to its opponents. Yet the Mexicans proved "to be wholly incapable of appreciating our forbearance and liberality," having snubbed American goodwill by launching a large resistance movement against the benevolent occupiers.<sup>23</sup> Unworthy of special treatment, Mexico would be forced to adopt the burden of funding and supplying the war effort that it itself had prolonged. The country would remain occupied until Mexico accepted a treaty.

Reforming the allegedly corrupt Mexican government was a noble idea, but it is doubtful that President Polk ever intended to pursue this course. By the time he had issued his annual message, he had already issued orders to military commanders to take measures to procure supplies

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<sup>22</sup> Sen. Exec. Doc. 15.

<sup>23</sup> President Polk wrote to Congress, "Not appreciating our forbearance, the Mexican people generally became hostile to the United States, and availed themselves of every opportunity to commit the most savage excesses upon our troops. Large numbers of the population took up arms, and, engaging in guerilla warfare, robbed and murdered in the most cruel manner individual soldiers, or small parties, who accident or other causes had separated from the main body of our army; bands of guerilleros and robbers infested the roads, harassed our trains, and, whenever it was in their power, cut off our supplies." Sen. Exec. Doc. 17.



and funds from their surroundings. Also, his administration had recalled negotiator Nicholas Trist in an attempt to terminate the American peace initiative.<sup>24</sup> Polk had clearly decided that Mexico should be put under greater pressure, but would that translate to a swift conclusion of the war?

These actions were done with an eye toward forcing the Mexican government to accept peace. However, with the Mexican government in disarray, no vital areas left to conquer, and, had Trist followed his orders, no official agent in Mexico to negotiate a treaty, the prospects for peace were increasingly distant. In choosing to pressure Mexico, Polk was well aware that he might be committing the American army to an occupation of indefinite length. In preparation, requests for significant increases in funds and manpower were included in his message to Congress. To keep the war effort financed through July 30, 1849, Polk asked for an additional loan of \$25,500,000.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, he appealed for the authority to recruit not only more volunteers, whose twelve month service limits were apparently inadequate, but also an additional force of regulars, to be discharged upon the ratification of a peace treaty.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Secretary of State Buchanan to Nicholas P. Trist, 6 October 1847, in James Buchanan, *The Works of James Buchanan* vol. 7, ed. John Bassett Moore (New York: Antiquarian Press Ltd., 1960), 427. Nicholas Trist was an agent of the President sent to negotiate a treaty with Mexico after the Slidell mission had failed. The Mexican government vacillated in its cooperation, but after nine months of hard work and disobeying a direct executive order to withdraw, Trist was able to secure the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Louis Martin Sears, "Nicholas P. Trist, A Diplomat with Ideals," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* vol. 11, no. 1 (June 1924), 96.

<sup>25</sup> Sen. Exec. Doc. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Sen. Exec. Doc. 19.

President Polk expected the impending occupation to be expensive in money and manpower, but his decision was a calculated one that he thought was within the American capability to achieve. For one, it is apparent that he thought Mexican resistance would not prohibit the success of a properly supplied occupation. Although Polk reasonably identified the widespread guerilla activity in occupied territory as a resistance movement, he cited it as evidence of Mexican uncouthness, not as an actual obstacle to American ambitions.<sup>27</sup> His willingness to alienate the population even further by instituting a system of forced indemnity indicated how little Mexican resistance concerned him.

President Polk also employed rhetoric that reflected a genuine belief in American strength and Mexican weakness. Mexican power was repeatedly described as "feeble," often in direct contrast to American power.<sup>28</sup> Americans, meanwhile, were described as "hardy, enterprising

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<sup>27</sup> President Polk's quotation cited in footnote 22 clearly acknowledged that guerilla attacks were not acts of generic criminality, but strikes specifically targeting the American occupation. However, he emphasized that their hostility was an unappreciative and rude reaction to America's generous occupation policy, not a threat to the occupation.

<sup>28</sup> "That it might be manifest not only to Mexico, but to all other nations, that the United States were not disposed to take advantage of a feeble power..." 9. "Mexico is too feeble a power to govern these provinces..." 9-10. In reference to a hypothetical independent California created by local revolutionaries, "Such a government would be too feeble long to maintain its separate independent existence..." 10. "Mexico has been, and must continue to be too feeble to restrain them [savages] from committing depredations, robberies and murders, not only upon the inhabitants of New Mexico itself, but upon those of the other northern States of Mexico. It would be a blessing to all these northern States to have their citizens protected against them by the power of the United States." Sen. Exec. Doc. 11.

and intelligent.”<sup>29</sup> One passage exuded praise for the valorous accomplishments of American arms, exclaiming, “Every patriot’s heart must exult, and a just national pride animate every bosom, in beholding the high proofs of courage, consummate military skill, steady discipline, and humanity to the vanquished enemy, exhibited by our gallant army...”<sup>30</sup> Some of the language that the President used was surely exaggerated, but overall his message reveals a glimpse of Polk’s understanding of the situation, where Mexico was at the mercy of the United States.

The information that Polk was being fed by advisors and generals reinforced this optimistic appraisal of the situation. General Scott had already developed and conveyed a plan for a prolonged occupation of Mexico, complete with specific details on the support needed to achieve it.<sup>31</sup> In addition to consolidating American dominance over the country by continuing to control key strategic points, Scott also committed Mexican assets to pay a portion of the costs that would inevitably

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<sup>29</sup> Sen. Exec. Doc. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Sen. Exec. Doc. 5.

<sup>31</sup> In a letter written after the capture of Mexico City cited by Senator Cass, General Scott wrote, “Augment this army to fifty thousand men to enable them to occupy, at the same time, nearly all the State capitals and other principal cities; to drive guerilla and other robbing parties from the great highways of trade; to seize into our hands all the ordinary revenues of the country, internal as well as external, for the support of the occupation, and to keep the central Government in constant motion and alarm, until constrained to sue for peace.” *Congressional Globe* 150. In a separate letter to Secretary of War Marcy, Scott wrote, “Annexation and military occupation would be, if we maintain the annexation, one and the same thing, as to the amount of force to be employed by us.” General Scott to Secretary of War Marcy, 25 December 1847, quoted in Scott 560-561.

accumulate over the indefinite duration of the occupation.<sup>32</sup> As the President had requested, the promised twelve to fifteen million dollars would reduce the amount of money paid from the American treasury, which from 1846 to 1848 had amounted to \$58 million.<sup>33</sup> Scott's confidence in his provisional solution seemed to demonstrate, on paper, that Mexico was susceptible to American control and even some degree of administration.

Meanwhile, several other generals strongly urged that Polk do away with unnecessary pretenses and annex Mexico outright.<sup>34</sup> General Quitman submitted an impassioned essay trumpeting the reasons why Mexico should be stripped of its independence. Annexation was achievable because, "It [Mexico] is already prostrated... With ten thousand men, we can hold this capital and Vera Cruz, and keep open a safe communication between the two points. Possessing the heart, there

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<sup>32</sup> "The war being virtually over, I now gave attention to a system of finance for the support of the army and to stimulate overtures of peace. The subject required extensive inquiries and careful elaboration. My intention was to raise the first year about twelve millions of dollars, with the least possible pressure on the industry and wealth of the country, with an. increase to fifteen millions in subsequent years. The plan is given at large, in seven papers (four reports and three orders). See Ex. Doc. No. 60, H. of R., 30th Congress, 1st Session, p. 1046, and following. The orders are here omitted and the finance details, contained in the four reports, also." Winfield Scott, *Memoirs of Lieut.-General Scott, LL.D.* vol. 2 (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1864), 553.

<sup>33</sup> K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War 1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974), 397.

<sup>34</sup> Several politicians commented on the prevalence of annexation sentiment among military leaders. Senator Niles remarked, "No one can mistake that it is the sentiment of the army... that this war is only to end with the conquest of Mexico." *Congressional Globe* 55. James Gadsden wrote, "I have not yet seen the officer that is not for conquest." James Gadsden to Senator Calhoun, 28 December 1847, in John C. Calhoun, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* vol. 25, ed. Clyde N. Wilson & Shirley Bright Cook (Charleston, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 46.

could be no sufficient force concentrated to annoy us."<sup>35</sup> General Worth was equally sure that annexation was both desirable and possible, albeit unconcerned about the details. As he frankly admitted to Secretary of War Marcy, "After much reflection I have arrived at the conclusion that it is our decided policy to hold the whole of Mexico—The details of the occupation are comparatively unimportant—I mean by occupation, *permanent conquest* and future annexation..."<sup>36</sup> While the President may or may not have been receptive to their clamor, their case could only reinforce Polk's contention that the state of things in Mexico was conducive to a successful, lengthy occupation.<sup>37</sup>

The external threat to the war effort that, from the outset, Americans were most apt to take seriously did not come from Mexico, but from across the Atlantic. Great Britain, with her powerful military and broad international interests, was, unlike Mexico, perceived to be a country to be reckoned with. Although President Polk had spoken confidently about the prospects of victory in an Anglo-American conflict, most Americans wanted to avoid war with Britain, particularly while

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<sup>35</sup> Letter from Major General Quitman, 15 October 1847, *General Scott and His Staff* (Philadelphia: Grigg, Elliot & Co., 1848), 103.

<sup>36</sup> General Worth to Secretary of War Marcy, 30 October 1847, Marcy MSS, quoted in Fuller, "The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico," 94.

<sup>37</sup> Although President Polk was well-known for territorial ambitions, the only official position he ever adopted toward annexation was its explicit rejection. No evidence suggests that he ever actually wanted to take all of Mexico. However, had peace been delayed any longer, Polk may well have added all land to the Sierra Madre to his demands. Fuller, "The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico," 126.

locked in battle with Mexico.<sup>38</sup> British intervention in the Mexican War had been a genuine, though distant, concern earlier in the war.<sup>39</sup> But by mid-1847, George Bancroft, who had been sent on a mission to England by Secretary of State Buchanan, relayed to the administration that British statesmen were resigned to American dominance over Mexico, and that they regarded drastic extensions of American boundaries an "inevitable necessity."<sup>40</sup> British sentiment, according to Bancroft, was embodied by Lord Palmerston's comment, "They are going to take two-thirds of Mexico. They might as well take the whole."<sup>41</sup> This suggested that the United States would be free to choose how to conclude its war with Mexico.

There is insufficient evidence to determine whether or not President Polk thought the annexation of Mexico was possible, since he never addressed that aspect of the issue directly. He believed Mexicans had the right and perhaps, with American help, the capability to govern themselves, and ended the discussion at that.

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<sup>38</sup> President Polk predicted victory in a war over Oregon and Canada as late as December 1845. "The President's Annual Message," *Niles' National Register* vol. 69, no. 1,784 (6 December 1845). However, most Americans welcomed the June 1846 Oregon settlement because it removed the grounds for conflict with Great Britain. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation*, 414.

<sup>39</sup> General Taylor gave a sober appraisal of Britain and the Mexican War, writing, "I apprehend no outbreak with England, be her cause of grievances what they may; she cannot do without our trade; although our people might be ready to rush into war with her; since our unprecedented success in Mexico; but should we have to measure strength with John Bull, we will find some difference between him & the Mexicans." Zachary Taylor, *Letters of Zachary Taylor from the Battle-Fields of the Mexican War* ed. William K. Bixby (Rochester, NY: The Genesee Press, 1908), 131.

<sup>40</sup> George Bancroft to Secretary of State Buchanan, 18 May 1847, in Buchanan 309.

<sup>41</sup> George Bancroft to Secretary of State Buchanan, 18 May 1847, in Buchanan 310.

However, President Polk's annual address did reveal he was optimistic that indefinite occupation was a practicable policy course. Garrisoning the country for an indeterminate period of time shared many traits with annexation. The absorption of Mexico may well have even been the culmination of that policy. Polk's conviction of the feasibility of indefinite occupation could only strengthen his confidence that Mexico could be annexed. For example, his contention that order could be maintained despite a widespread guerilla movement and an indemnity policy that would further estrange the Mexican population, combined with the rhetoric he used to describe the two countries, supported the idea that these obstacles could be overcome in an all Mexico context. Some asserted that the policies of occupation and annexation amounted to the same thing, as Senator John M. Clayton asked, "Pray, sir, what do you call keeping the Central Government in motion, occupying the State capitals, and seizing the revenues of Mexico? I call it subjugation of the country and an annihilation of the Government of Mexico."<sup>42</sup> Even if his message did not explicitly comment on the achievability of taking all Mexico, it certainly did not give cause for doubt that Mexico could be dominated.

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<sup>42</sup> *Congressional Globe* 151.

### **Senator Cass' Ten-Regiment Bill**

President Polk's message to Congress stated plainly the forceful mode in which he wished to prosecute the war, but the decision was not entirely the President's to make. It was up to Congress to provide the President with the resources and manpower with which to conduct his policy of choice. Polk's supporters faced opposition from both members of the rival Whig party and dissenting Democrats, so many senators were not about to allow the President's plan go unchallenged.<sup>43</sup> Senator John Berrien demonstrated the attitude of many of his peers when he asserted legislative authority, saying, "We should determine for ourselves—not at the bidding of the President, but for ourselves, as the constitutional depository of the war-making power—what are the objects to be accomplished."<sup>44</sup> For two long months legislators would debate over the future course of the war, including the viability of the controversial all Mexico movement.

As soon as the 30<sup>th</sup> Congress assembled, Senators were anxious to begin passing legislation influencing the policy of the war. On December 15, 1847, two Democrats submitted resolutions pertaining to the future prosecution of the war. Senator John Calhoun of South Carolina called

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<sup>43</sup> The composition of the 30<sup>th</sup> congress was thirty-eight Democrats, twenty-one Whigs, and one Independent, and the majority party suffered from considerable disunity.

<sup>44</sup> *Congressional Globe* 79.



for an official statement of intent to avoid annexing Mexico.<sup>45</sup> Shortly thereafter, Senator Daniel Dickenson of New York countered with a request that the United States annex as much territory as would be deemed expedient.<sup>46</sup> In addition to these resolutions, Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan had introduced a bill calling for the increase in the army sought by President Polk. He, too, expected its prompt consideration. Naturally, a day was spent deciding whose contribution had priority as each argued that his was the most vital. Senator Cass' Ten Regiment Bill eventually won precedence, but its succinct consideration was not to be. The necessity of an army increase, its potential implications for the fate of Mexico, and the justice of the war itself all became fair game in the Senate deliberation over Senator Cass' bill. The debate became a catch-all for all issues surrounding the continued prosecution of the war, and did not conclude before the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo rendered each man's proposed legislation essentially moot.

Before Senator Cass had much of an opportunity to defend his bill, it came under attack. Cass' contention that the army urgently needed to be augmented was a prime target for criticism. Senator John Berrien of Georgia, a Whig, dismissed the need for more troops, saying, "It is evident

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<sup>45</sup> "Resolved, That no line of policy in the further prosecution of the war should be adopted which may lead to consequences so disastrous [the incorporation of Mexico into the Union]." *Congressional Globe* 26.

<sup>46</sup> "Resolved, That true policy requires the Government of the United States to strengthen its political and commercial relations upon this continent, by the annexation of such contiguous territory as may conduce to that end, and can be justly obtained..." *Congressional Globe* 27.

that the army in Mexico was perfectly safe—flushed with victory, and confident in its strength... while the army of the enemy is scattered, dispersed, and Mexico is without an efficient government, and destitute of resources and men to resist our arms.”<sup>47</sup> In the same vein, Senator John Crittenden of Kentucky, also a Whig, asked, “If Mexico now lies prostrate before you, without an army or government; with here and there only a body of guerillas, instead of an army to oppose you, what, in the name of Heaven, if this is all that is left of her, do you want with ten thousand more troops?”<sup>48</sup> According to their argument, the only realistic threat to the United States could be found on a battlefield. Being far too weak to organize and field another army, Mexico “was now nothing but a huge undigested mass of vanity and faction.”<sup>49</sup> The country was defanged in their view and entirely at America’s mercy. Save for the trifling “few skirmishes here and there with parties of guerrillas,” the road in front of the occupation forces was clear.<sup>50</sup>

Democratic supporters of the bill disputed this line of reasoning, emphasizing the difference between a war and an occupation. Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi conceded that, even at its current size, the American army could march through South America and defeat every army it encountered, but routing conventional forces was no longer the

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<sup>47</sup> *Congressional Globe* 79.

<sup>48</sup> *Congressional Globe* 112.

<sup>49</sup> *Congressional Globe* 114.

<sup>50</sup> *Congressional Globe* 113.

task at hand. Although Mexico had been defeated militarily, he ventured that "we have not even suppressed the hostility of the Mexican people... Mexico is not conquered."<sup>51</sup> Senator William Allen of Ohio lent even more urgency to the situation, listing the tremendous obstacles facing American forces:

Well, sir, under these circumstances, with that army cut, hacked, and bleeding in the achievement of its glorious victories, shall we leave them there, to occupy a country as large as our own, surrounded by ten millions of enemies, and subjected to all the perils to which their precarious situation exposes them, without taking the precaution to sustain them by additional reinforcements?<sup>52</sup>

Senator Allen's appraisal of the situation certainly suggested that the occupation force was in dire straits, but the gravity of these obstacles was tempered by the notion that they could be overcome. The United States, according to Senator Cass, had proven itself to be among "the mightiest nations of the world."<sup>53</sup> With enough soldiers, the American army could not only endure these burdens, but even reduce the likelihood of resistance. Cass believed that a large force would intimidate the population into submission, and perhaps, as the merits of American administration sank in over time, reconcile them to the United States.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Congressional Globe* 114.

<sup>52</sup> *Congressional Globe* 80.

<sup>53</sup> *Congressional Globe* 88.

<sup>54</sup> "It is much better to render opposition hopeless, by the display of strength, than to excite it into action, by the display of weakness." *Congressional Globe* 88. "With few sympathies to unite them to us, we can continue to govern them, and govern them with energy and justice, such as are new in their history... till the experience of our sway and

Thus, although Democratic supporters of President Polk's policy admitted that the troubles that the occupation army faced were serious, they also perceived that those difficulties were surmountable in both the short and long terms.<sup>55</sup>

Other Whigs opposed the bill from an entirely different angle. According to Senator John Hale of New Hampshire, Senator John Clayton of Delaware, and Senator Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, voting to enlarge the army would be wrong because the whole war was unjust. Senator Johnson offered a description of the regrettable situation. "She surrenders. Yet still our vengeance is not glutted. Innocent, unoffending, outraged Mexico has yet more cities to be laid to waste or conquered... [by] the mighty and crushing power of our arms."<sup>56</sup> The legitimacy of the war was frequently contested by Whig Congressmen in the House of Representatives, as well.<sup>57</sup> Congressman John Van Dyke of New Jersey argued that the pursuit of the war and indemnity, with "our conquering sword gleaming above her, is unreasonable and unfair towards Mexico...

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its operation around them shall have brought them to a better state of feeling." *Congressional Globe* 89.

<sup>55</sup> Senator Crittenden, meanwhile, insisted that Senator Cass in fact "did not apprehend any danger" from the threats that he treated so seriously, instead desiring the army increase for "any possible contingency." Even if Crittenden was correct and the Democrats' argument was not genuine, the prospects for the success of the occupation still seemed good. *Congressional Globe* 113.

<sup>56</sup> *Congressional Globe* 140. Senator Hale agreed that, "The country is engaged in a war which is unjustifiable; we confess it is wrong to go on." *Congressional Globe* 122. Senator Clayton equated conquest to robbery. *Congressional Globe* 151.

<sup>57</sup> On one day alone, four Whig Congressmen issued resolutions calling for wartime restraint on these grounds. See the resolutions of Congressmen Bott, Thompson, Toombs, and Van Dyke. *Congressional Globe* 61-62.

and unmagnanimous and unchristian in us.”<sup>58</sup> Innocent, weak Mexico was at the mercy of American arms, so it was up to politicians to direct the United States along a path that was more becoming of an honorable, Christian nation.

No matter their attitude toward the Ten-Regiment Bill, politicians portrayed a scenario where the prospects of a successful occupation were good. If the extra regiments were deemed unnecessary, it was because American power had already eliminated any relevant Mexican resistance. If reinforcements were needed, it was to ensure that Mexican resistance would be overcome. Finally, if the continued prosecution of the war was unjust, it was because Mexico was an innocent victim. Images of Mexican innocence were accompanied by images of defenselessness in the face of American power. Each line of reasoning featured the persistent theme of Mexican weakness and American strength. In the context of annexation, it would be difficult to argue, by these politicians' estimates, that Mexico could offer effective resistance to American domination.

### **The Debate over the Value of Annexation**

The direction of the Ten-Regiment Bill debate changed considerably on January 11 when Senator John Clayton expanded on the

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<sup>58</sup> *Congressional Globe* 62.

Whigs' unjust war thesis by venturing that increasing the army and following the President's occupation plan would lead to an equally unjust annexation of Mexico.<sup>59</sup> Although Senator Calhoun had implied this same point in a verbal explanation of his resolution one week earlier, only now did it begin to gain momentum. Quickly the debate transformed into a discussion of the value of absorbing Mexico, which some claimed to have merit and others argued to be "among the greatest calamities that could happen."<sup>60</sup> In their arguments, however, neither group seriously challenged the American capability to realize the annexation. Indeed, many Senators had concrete concepts of an American-dominated Mexico, which they fully expected would be realized once the decision was made to annex Mexico.

Senator Calhoun had fired the first shot in this conflict well before it had fully developed. He had predicted that the war would not quickly resolve, and feared that the President's plan of "conquering peace" would inevitably "have blotted her [Mexico] out of the list of nations," in the same way that England stumbled into control of India.<sup>61</sup> Aware that any conclusion to the war, no matter how drastic, might increase in appeal as the stalemate dragged on, Calhoun tailored his resolution to deny the option of annexation.

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<sup>59</sup> *Congressional Globe* 151.

<sup>60</sup> *Congressional Globe* 79.

<sup>61</sup> *Congressional Globe* 96, 97.

On January 4 Calhoun received the opportunity to give his reasoning and presented his argument point by point. First, annexation was inconsistent with the object of the war. The United States needed to disprove international suspicions of American ambition and belligerence, and reemphasize America's traditional reputation for "wisdom, moderation, discretion, justice, and other high qualities."<sup>62</sup>

Second, there was no precedent of forcing a people into the Union.<sup>63</sup> Nor was there a reason to start now, because, as his third point, "we have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race—the free white race." To place the "Indians and mixed race of Mexico" on equality with Anglo-Saxons would be "fatal to our institutions."<sup>64</sup>

Senator Calhoun's fourth and fifth points elaborated on the theme that annexation was inconsistent with American traditions. Conquest was not in keeping with republican ideals, and would be subversive to those ideals by establishing empire. His sixth, final point was that Mexico could never be fully incorporated into the United States, since forcing annexation would require a constant military presence. "Never will the time come," Calhoun warned, "that these Mexicans will be heartily reconciled to your authority... Of all nations on the earth they are the

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<sup>62</sup> *Congressional Globe* 98.

<sup>63</sup> Native Americans, Senator Calhoun notes, "have either been left as an independent people amongst us, or been driven into the forests." *Congressional Globe* 98.

<sup>64</sup> *Congressional Globe* 98.

most pertinacious... [and] hold out longest, and often even with the least prospect of effecting their object." Even if the population was somehow acquiescent, he reemphasized that it was a mistake to absorb those "ignorant and unfit for liberty, unpure races." All precautions had to be taken to avoid the "great and fatal mistake" of annexing Mexico.<sup>65</sup>

Although Senator Calhoun provided an exhaustive list of concerns, it is evident that the American ability to control and administer a conquered Mexico was not chief among of them. When making his argument, Calhoun had governmental templates in mind. He expected the American administration to be in sufficient control to first implement territorial government, and then to try to fully incorporate Mexico into the United States.<sup>66</sup> Although Calhoun did not think that the Mexican *estados* would ever truly integrate into the predominantly Anglo-Saxon states of the Union, he did predict the territory would resemble a colony, held by force, along the lines of British India or Ireland.<sup>67</sup> His fundamental argument was that having such a colony would be detrimental to the United States. Ultimately, though Calhoun thought the annexation of

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<sup>65</sup> *Congressional Globe* 99.

<sup>66</sup> "You can establish a Territorial Government for every State in Mexico, and there are some twenty of them. You can appoint governors, judges, and magistrates. You can give the people a subordinate government, allowing them to legislate for themselves, whilst you defray the cost. So far as law goes, the thing is done." *Congressional Globe* 97.

<sup>67</sup> "We see England with dependant provinces... [Mexico] will be but a Provincial Government, under the name of a Territorial Government." Calhoun compared an American-dominated Mexico specifically to "Hindustan" and Ireland, as well as to British colonies in general, arguing that such colonies would be ineffectual burdens to the United States. *Congressional Globe* 96, 97.



Mexico would be an expensive, heavy burden, his worry that it could in fact be achieved was a primary motivation for submitting the resolution.

With Senator Clayton's warning about the imminent eventuality of absorbing Mexico, other Senators joined Calhoun in proclaiming the pitfalls of annexation. Senator Andrew Butler, the other Democratic Senator of South Carolina, seconded many of his colleague's reservations. Conquering Mexico was costly, and invited tyranny in the United States.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, Senator James Pearce of Maryland, a Whig, predicted particularly dire consequences. Not only would Mexico be to the United States what Ireland was to Great Britain, but it would also exacerbate domestic friction, presumably over slavery, beyond the point of no return.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, both Senators gave confident appraisals of the progress of the occupation by emphasizing America's unmitigated domination over Mexico.<sup>70</sup> Despite the disasters that would befall the

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<sup>68</sup> Annexation would require extended occupation, since "such a government could not stand without the perpetual guarantee of a standing army." American institutions were also imperiled by such a course. "When the fires of virtuous patriotism that were kindled on the altar of our country by the founders of the Republic shall have burnt down under the ambitious lust of conquest, there will be no rebuking influence left to purify and restrain lawless ambition." *Congressional Globe* 188, 189.

<sup>69</sup> To Senator Calhoun, Ireland was "a source of heavy expense, and a burden," while to Senator Pearce Ireland represented "a perpetual source of bloodshed, embarrassment, annoyance, [and] endless disquietude." *Congressional Globe* 98, 175. Pearce also warned ominously of overextension, that, "If we go on this way enlarging our boundaries, must we not eventually be broken into fragments? The bonds which unite our country, if stretched so far, must inevitably snap." *Congressional Globe* 176.

<sup>70</sup> Senator Butler shamed supporters of the all Mexico movement, asking, should we "prosecute this war, devastate the country, sequester the revenues, disarm the populace, reduce them to such a state that they can make no resistance, but must appeal to us, and ask to be annexed to our Confederacy?" Senator Pearce cited a Latin saying, "*Parcere subjectis, debellare superbas?*" Shall we make war on the weak, and not upon the strong? I fear we have forgotten that maxim in our course towards

United States as a result, annexing Mexico seemed like an attainable, albeit highly undesirable, objective.

Fuller argues that public support for all Mexico had become much more conspicuous by this time, leading some Democrat Senators to subtly revise their earlier positions.<sup>71</sup> Several now cautiously tested the waters, careful to present only a "hypothetical view of the compensating advantages likely to arise from the annexation of Mexico," not advocate the deed itself.<sup>72</sup> Among other economic and strategic gains, a prolonged occupation would pave the way for the "political and social regeneration" of the Mexican people, "uniting her to us" under "civilizing and Americanizing influence."<sup>73</sup> Senator John Dix of New York described the beneficial role that the occupation force would play:

As hostilities are now suspended, the chief province of the army will be to maintain internal tranquility, support the civil authorities in the execution of the laws, to free the country from the robber and guerrilla bands by which it is infested, and subserve the great purposes of government by affording security to liberty, property, and life—a security the Mexicans have not fully enjoyed. The very exercise of these beneficent agencies will tend to disarm the hostility towards us with the thinking portion of the population.<sup>74</sup>

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Mexico, and trample upon her least able to resist us." Both passages offer a dim view of Mexico's ability to resist subjugation. *Congressional Globe* 186, 175.

<sup>71</sup> Fuller, "The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico," 103. Senator Cass, for instance, who had earlier insisted that "no man in this nation" wanted to annex Mexico, now said that "we may have to make the great experiment... and annex the domains of Mexico to our own." *Congressional Globe* 54, 216.

<sup>72</sup> *Congressional Globe* 220.

<sup>73</sup> *Congressional Globe* 220, 255.

<sup>74</sup> *Congressional Globe* 255.

As for the rest of the population, Senator Henry Foote of Mississippi allayed any concerns.<sup>75</sup> He concurred that annexation was not only achievable but beneficial, outlining the specific steps the occupation army would take to successfully absorb Mexico into the United States as a stable and prosperous territory.<sup>76</sup> With rich resources and a mostly docile, if not outright welcoming, population, annexation could not seem more practicable!

Expansionist Senators clearly had administrative templates of a dominated Mexico in mind. At first glance, it might seem as if they advocated a policy of incorporating Mexico into the Union. The redemption of backward Mexico was a prominent theme in their speeches, but it was not necessarily a genuine goal. Philanthropy was a convenient and noble justification for annexation, which, according to historian Frederick Merk, rang true with Americans' understanding of Manifest Destiny.<sup>77</sup> However, judging from the potential economic and strategic benefits that they cited, the Senators had no intention of lifting Mexicans into equality with Americans. In listing these benefits, Senator

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<sup>75</sup> Indians, who comprised over fifty percent of the population by his estimate, were "gentle in their manners, docile, obedient, orderly, and industrious in their habits." Peons, who accounted for about ten percent of the population, were "a mixed race, slaves in the most unfavorable sense of the word." The only group hostile to American goals, at less than three percent of the population, was the "aristocratic party," while the remainder were "the puros or democrats of Mexico, the friends of republican institutions, always friendly to our people and government, and especially so in this war." *Congressional Globe* 220.

<sup>76</sup> *Congressional Globe* 219-221.

<sup>77</sup> Of expansionists' rationalization, Merk writes, "Around the stark form of annexation, a cover, pleasing in design, was draped. It was regeneration." Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission*, 121.

Foote ignored the Mexican people altogether, depicting Mexico as rich, virgin land perfect for American settlers and entrepreneurs.<sup>78</sup> Senator Dix echoed his colleague's vision, confidently asserting, "Settlements will be formed within the unoccupied and sparsely-peopled territory of Mexico."<sup>79</sup> Such language invoked images of the American West, but here it was being applied to the land south of the Rio Grande.<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, the idea of taking advantage of Mexican land under American supervision sounded suspiciously like the administration of Indian territory, under which Native Americans were displaced and their land exploited by prospectors. That was a plan with which expansionists would have been very familiar. The strategy was not very old, and the man largely behind it, Senator Lewis Cass, still pursued an active political career.<sup>81</sup> Once the decision was made to annex Mexico, expansionist Senators expected that the country would be absorbed neither as a

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<sup>78</sup> "There is ascertained to be an immense body of valuable land in Mexico, heretofore unappropriated, there being, as I am assured, from twenty-five to thirty millions of acres of the richest lands in the world yet unoccupied in the State of Vera Cruz, and a proportionate quantity in most of the States which have not yet become densely peopled. By bestowing farms of moderate extent upon actual settlers, the whole country would soon become occupied by a population equal to any under the sun." *Congressional Globe* 220.

<sup>79</sup> *Congressional Globe* 256.

<sup>80</sup> "With such a territory and such a people on our southern border... [this] is to be the inevitable course of empire." *Congressional Globe* 256.

<sup>81</sup> Cass became Governor of Michigan Territory shortly after the War of 1812, and quickly set about bringing this frontier more securely into the American fold. He was one of the first Americans to vigorously pursue a policy of dispersing the natives and colonizing the land. Although the contemporary perception of Michigan as a desolate and untamed region initially deterred prospectors, Cass' efforts to draw settlers to the Territory gradually bore fruit, at the expense of the native peoples. Cass' frontier strategy helped set the policy precedent for future American westward expansion. See Andrew C. McLaughlin, *Lewis Cass* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1972), 95-99.

colony nor as an integral part of the Union, but as virgin land along the lines of freshly conquered Indian territory.

Senator Pearce, whose warning about overextension could be interpreted as a concern that Mexico could not be held once taken, came closest to outright challenging the American capacity for success. However, his statement was more likely aimed at forecasting the split of the North and South over domestic friction generated by slavery. No politician explicitly challenged America's ability to control and administer Mexico. Many implied that retaining a hold on the country would generate immense costs and frustration, but emphasized the burden that the United States would be shouldering rather than strictly challenge the American capacity to pull it off. Indeed, this emphasis suggests that it was their fear that Mexico's could be permanently dominated that led so many Senators to passionately oppose any such action.

### **Conclusion**

How the United States should proceed in its war against Mexico was a divisive question that urgently needed to be answered in early 1848. The President and some Senators made it clear that they wanted to prosecute the war with redoubled effort, allegedly to pressure Mexicans into seeking peace. Other Senators vehemently opposed this course, claiming it to be unnecessary or unjust. All the while, the all Mexico

movement was gaining momentum, leading several Senators to address the prospects of annexation directly. Yet throughout all the political debate, no voice suggested that Mexico could not be held interminably.

President Polk explicitly stated that he did not seek annexation, but points in his address cast no doubt that it was possible. Pursuing a course of indefinite occupation indicated that he believed Mexico could be subjugated for a long time. Seeking to increase the pressure on a population already showing signs of resistance was an especially bold move, demonstrating his confidence in America's capacity to dominate the Mexican populace. Particularly if he accepted the optimistic appraisals of his advisors, President Polk may well have considered annexation to be feasible.

Congress echoed the President's confidence in American capability. Democratic Senators who supported Polk's plan admitted that the current garrison force might be insufficient to keep a grip on Mexico, but they were certain that several more regiments could accomplish the task. Those who believed that additional troops were unnecessary felt that Mexican resistance was no threat. And Whig Senators who felt that the war was unjust shamed their colleagues for letting defenseless Mexico be laid prostrate by aggressive American arms. Each argument emphasized America's ability to dominate Mexico.

When Congress discussed annexation directly, the debate centered on the value of such a peace, not on whether or not it could be achieved. Senators Dix and Foote clearly had no doubts that if the United States decided to annex Mexico, the country would submit to American administration and become a beneficial addition to United States territory. Other Senators offered less sanguine appraisals of Mexico's worth. Opponents of annexation often based their arguments on impressions of Mexican racial inferiority, predicting that Mexico would be a burden and undermine American institutions. They accepted that the United States could dominate Mexico permanently, but insisted that achieving that goal would be detrimental for the Union and its ideals.

No matter the stance that American politicians adopted toward the way the war should be prosecuted, Mexico's fate appeared to be entirely in American hands. Each position featured language that implied American strength, Mexican weakness, or both. Because of these perceptions, American politicians held no reservations that the annexation of Mexico was achievable. This explains why the discussion of feasibility was absent from the debate.

## CHAPTER II

### PERCEPTIONS OF MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES IN AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS DURING THE OCCUPATION, 1847-1848

Despite having overcome Mexico's army and occupied its prominent cities, in January of 1848 the United States remained at war with a country seemingly unwilling to admit defeat. A few months earlier, American politicians had disputed whether or not territorial demands were appropriate peace terms, but as the war dragged on many Americans began to contemplate more drastic measures. Politicians now debated whether or not it was pragmatic to annex all Mexico. *The New York Herald*, a Democratic-leaning publication, declared,

The longer duration of Mexico's nationality... is in the scale. If she submits to terms of peace acceptable to the United States, before the period of our Presidential election, she may yet remain a separate and independent nation-if she does not, her fate is sealed forever, and the stars and strips [sic] will, of right, legally and equitably take the place of the eagle and the snake. In nine months, at most, Mexico will be Mexico still, or part of the United States.<sup>82</sup>

Contemporary critics might challenge the author's assertion that absorbing Mexico would be legal and equitable, but it was clear that the longer the war lasted, the more momentum the all Mexico movement gained. There was a sense that if the American policy of occupation

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<sup>82</sup> "The Present – The Future – Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 26 January 1848, 2.



persisted, the United States would inevitably and unavoidably annex Mexico. While Congress debated the expediency of the consequences of staying the course, the idea that the United States did not have the capability to annex Mexico remained conspicuously absent from the dialogue. Indeed, the urgency with which some Senators contested Senator Cass' Ten Regiment Bill and President Polk's plan "to prosecute it [the war] with increased energy and power," stemmed from worries that America absolutely could annex Mexico, and that the integrity of American institutions would subsequently suffer.<sup>83</sup>

American politicians did not challenge their country's ability to annex Mexico because their understandings of America and Mexico undermined the grounds on which to do so. Each faction's arguments relied upon Mexican and American stereotypes that had become entrenched among Americans over the course of the Mexican-American War. Expansionists saw opportunities to be had in a rich land ripe for the taking. Calhoun Democrats feared the consequences of incorporating the large, "mixed race" of Mexico into the union.<sup>84</sup> Whigs portrayed Mexicans as the helpless victims of American bullying. Debates in Washington D.C. offered glimpses of how politicians perceived Mexico and the United States. However, other sources offer a more complete perspective.

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<sup>83</sup> See Chapter I. Sen. Exec. Doc. 14.

<sup>84</sup> *Congressional Globe* 98.

Many contemporary newspapers were unabashedly partisan.<sup>85</sup> Their contents frequently indicated and elaborated on the political positions of the party that their editors supported. Not shy to display their political affiliations, authors made no claim to be objective. Yet they did claim to be reporting facts.<sup>86</sup> As sources that strove to be authoritative, periodicals both influenced and reflected common cultural perceptions of the United States and Mexico. A portrait of Mexicans and Americans emerged, which often transcended party lines and gave no reason to doubt the ability of the United States to annex Mexico. Mexicans were innocuous, uncivilized, and inferior, and thus posed little threat to American plans. Americans, by contrast, were powerful, enlightened, and superior, and thus capable of monumental deeds.

This chapter provides a close reading of contemporary newspapers because of their close connections to politics and their reflection of

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<sup>85</sup> Objectivity was a not a professed goal of the press until the twentieth century. According to historian Richard Kaplan, "partisanship was a public and ubiquitous phenomenon that defined the very essence of nineteenth-century American journalism." Richard L. Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1. Some periodicals, like *The Berkshire County Whig* of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, proudly announced their affiliation in their names. Other newspapers carried articles that left no doubt about which party it supported. For instance, a passage in *The Daily Ohio Statesman* read, "Democrats, you have done your duty-the victory is yours, and now you stand before the world as the noble defenders of correct principles-as vigilant sentinels upon the walls of your country." "Victory!! – Democracy is Triumphant," *The Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH), 14 October 1847, 2. For a detailed account of how party politics shaped the news media in the United States during this era, see William E. Huntzicker, *The Popular Press, 1833-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 35-51.

<sup>86</sup> One author began an article with a quotation from Dr. Franklin, "'Give me facts before your common sense.'" He went on to assert, "A writer on the present condition of Mexico stakes more than his literary reputation on the result, for at every page his veracity may be questioned." Col. Albert C. Ramsey, "Field Notes. Statistics, Observations, and Thoughts on the Civil Condition of Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 14 February 1848, 1.

common perceptions. Most articles were written between the fall of Mexico City in September 1847, and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in February 1848. They came from twelve major newspapers from the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, West, and South.<sup>87</sup> However, the articles cited from this sample may also have reached beyond these newspapers' readership, as they were often printed in multiple publications.<sup>88</sup>

The amount of material cited from each source depended largely on the topics each focused on. *The New York Herald*, for example, was a widely read newspaper that tightly embraced the ideology Manifest Destiny. Its authors called for unrestrained expansion and frequently juxtaposed the United States and Mexico, describing each country's characteristics and values to better demonstrate the importance of the war and the conquests that would follow. As periodicals go, it provided an unprecedented amount of relevant material.

Whig newspapers, by comparison, were less dedicated to providing details on the relationship between Mexico and the United States.

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<sup>87</sup> The articles in this chapter came from the following periodicals. Democratic-leaning newspapers: *The New York Herald*, *The Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH), *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), *The Macon Weekly Telegraph*, *The Morning News* (New London, CT), *The Southern Patriot* (Charleston, SC), and *The Wisconsin Democrat* (Madison, WI). Whig-leaning newspapers: *The Berkshire Country Whig* (Pittsfield, MA), *The Emancipator* (Boston, MA), *The New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, NH), *The Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro VT), and *The Constitution* (Middletown CT).

<sup>88</sup> For example, pieces that originated from *The Boston Whig*, *The National Intelligencer*, *The Philadelphia Ledger* and *The New Orleans Picayune*, among others, turned up in the newspapers I analyzed. Conversely, articles of national importance that debuted in major publications like *The New York Herald* would be disseminated amongst other papers.

Occasionally an author would reveal some indication of his perspective when directly challenging a Democratic argument. However, the majority of articles concerning the conflict focused on the morality of the war. More pragmatic issues were not in doubt, but neither were they Whigs' main concerns. As a result, the material cited from these sources is more limited.

### **American Fortitude**

In *The New York Herald*, a Democratic author exclaimed, "What a great people we are!"<sup>89</sup> This statement, which could be interpreted several ways, perhaps best summed up the general understanding that Americans had of the United States. Democrats principally used the word *great* to imply integrity and nobility. They proudly emphasized American glory, spirit, and values. Whigs also acknowledged American gallantry, but were less apt to glorify the deeds of a belligerent nation. Whig sources generally treated *great* as meaning powerful, acknowledging the military success of the United States. Both interpretations implied that American strength did not falter in the face of adversity.

This same theme of American fortitude could be identified in political speeches when wartime success was being described. Politicians

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<sup>89</sup> The author made this statement because he was very impressed by America's program to improve Mexican infrastructure during the occupation, specifically the plan to build a railroad from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. "American and Mexican Affairs: Life in Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 10 January 1848, 1.

of both parties accepted the use of the rhetoric of military gallantry to describe American victories on the battlefield.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, authors of many newspaper articles often employed the same language. Words like *gallant*, *courage*, and *heroic* showed up frequently, particularly in Democratic-leaning publications.<sup>91</sup>

In a time when there was a great deal of pressure to be patriotic, this language was certainly in part a calculated, overt expression of national pride. However, that did not necessarily mean it was considered to be empty rhetoric. The combats of 1846 and 1847 supported the notion that American strength derived from something more than just conventional military power. Were numbers alone the deciding factors, the American army would have been foiled at every turn. Senator Cass claimed that one of the "proudest trophies" of the war was a table prepared by the Adjutant General's Office describing an uninterrupted "series of successes" from 1846 through 1847. The details show that out of

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<sup>90</sup> See Chapter I. Democratic politicians extolled the valor of American soldiers with florid language. For instance, President Polk praised "the high proofs of courage, consummate military skill, steady discipline, and humanity to the vanquished enemy, exhibited by our gallant army." Sen. Exec. Doc. 5. Whigs, whose patriotism was being questioned by Democrats, agreed with the moderate use of such language. For example, many Whig Congressmen were willing to support a resolution thanking the army for their "courage, skill, fortitude, and good conduct," so long as long as that resolution was not construed as an official sanction of the war. *The Congressional Globe*, 29<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., vol. 16 (Washington D.C.: Blair and Rives, 1847), 295.

<sup>91</sup> These words appear hundreds of times in 1847 editions of *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), *The New York Herald*, *The Macon Weekly Telegraph*, *The Southern Patriot* (Charleston, SC), *The Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH), and *The Wisconsin Democrat* (Madison, WI), in reference to the entire military, prominent officers, and individual fallen soldiers. "America's Historical Newspapers, 1690-1922," *Archive of Americana* <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>> (15 March 2008).

twenty-eight battles, Americans were outnumbered in all but one: the siege of Vera Cruz. During the average engagement there were three Mexican *soldados* for every American soldier, yet Mexican forces suffered three times the number of American casualties and greater mortality.<sup>92</sup> The statistics themselves were not entirely accurate, as the Adjutant General freely admitted, and were surely cited by Senator Cass out of political motivation.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, they did inform and reflect the story being told in the United States.

Newspapers carried articles citing success after success. Depending on their political affiliation, some lauded impressive victories, while others simply summarized battles with little fanfare. Take, for instance, the various portrayals of the Battle of Chapultepec, an assault on a fortress outside Mexico City in September 1847. As news of the battle became available, *The New York Herald* published a letter that described it as an encounter with "a large force of the enemy's best troops, ...in which the Mexicans received as usual a good thrashing." The author highlighted that Americans had "fought like devils," and that their

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<sup>92</sup> See Figure 3 on page 64.

<sup>93</sup> Referring to the table, Senator Cass confessed, "The Adjutant General remarks, that he cannot vouch for the perfect accuracy of the above statements, as from their nature they must often be estimated." There is no doubt that between the battlefield and the Capitol, some of those estimates became exaggerated. Details aside, though, the table accurately depicted the impressive battle record that the United States had developed during its military operations in Mexico. *Congressional Globe* 87.

casualties were reportedly light.<sup>94</sup> An article from *The New Orleans Picayune*, repeated in other major newspapers including that of Senator Calhoun's home state, described the same assault as "another battle and another... great American victory."<sup>95</sup> Less sympathetic to the Democrats was *The Emancipator* of Boston, which tucked news of the conflict inside a piece emphasizing that the truce with Mexico was broken. The battle was regarded as "a terrible fight," but the author acknowledged that a small American band had prevailed over an impressive Mexican force.<sup>96</sup>

No matter the wording, these articles conveyed a sense of accomplishment in the face of adversity. One expansionist even ventured that General Scott could set up his own empire at the behest of the United States. "You may laugh at this proposition; but think over it, and you will find it feasible. Scott has the men of daring with him, capable of any chivalrous achievement, and why should they not found an empire! ...Posterity would accredit them as the greatest of heroes."<sup>97</sup>

It was particularly important to Democrats to emphasize that American gallantry was not a uniquely wartime phenomenon. Newspapers printed speeches by officers who elaborated on this deciding factor. American soldiers who had rallied in the face of

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<sup>94</sup> "Highly Important Intelligence from the City of Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 1 October 1847, 2.

<sup>95</sup> "Important from the City of Mexico," *The Southern Patriot*, 1 October 1847, 2.

<sup>96</sup> "Highly Important from Mexico," *The Emancipator* (Boston, MA), 6 October 1847, 3.

<sup>97</sup> "A Patent Peace Project," *Morning News* (New London, CT), 22 December 1847, 3.

overwhelming odds reflected the indomitable American spirit. Soldiers best demonstrated the spirit through their impressive triumphs, but it was innate in every good citizen.<sup>98</sup> The United States derived its strength through "the spirit and determination, union and energy of the American people."<sup>99</sup>

Wartime success had proven American military capability, but it had further implications. The strength needed to defeat armies was easily interpreted as the same strength needed to occupy a nation. Gallantry on the battlefield translated to a broadly construed sense of power. Particularly with the Democratic emphasis on an intangible American spirit, the country's strength became at once vague and all-encompassing. These were critical components to Americans' understandings of their own country. Combined with the way enemy resistance was described, Americans could hardly doubt that occupied Mexico would submit to American domination.

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<sup>98</sup> Gen. Shields declared that these battles had not been won through "military science... It was the stout hearts and strong arms of American soldiers. ...The same spirit that animates this meeting to-night is that which fought and conquered in the valley of Mexico." "Dinner to Generals Quitman and Shields," *The National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), cited in *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), 13 January 1848, 1.

<sup>99</sup> "Capt. Reed's Speech---Another Withering Rebuke of the Treasonable Course of Mexican Whigs in the United States," *The Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH), 16 December 1847, 2.



### **Domination over Mexico**

Having returned from the battlefields of Mexico near the end of the war, Generals Quitman and Shields addressed an audience at a New Orleans dinner party to celebrate the triumphs of American arms. But before General Shields launched into his commendation of the soldiers, he prefaced his speech by pointing out that Americans at home were "much too accustomed to underrate [Mexicans]." <sup>100</sup> He recognized that vanquishing a weak and unworthy enemy hardly glorified the achievements of the vanquishers. However, his implication that Mexicans had been a threatening opponent may have been poorly received.

The common assumption in the United States was that Mexico was unable to mount effective resistance. Among Democrats, it was popular to portray Mexicans as innocuous in multiple ways. Whigs, meanwhile, favored disputing the justness of the war over discussing the nature of the Mexican people. For them, the question was not whether or not the United States could take over Mexico, but whether or not it should do so. <sup>101</sup> Yet significantly they did not challenge the claim that Mexico was defenseless.

A primary criticism of the Mexican people was that they lacked fighting spirit. The Mexican government's refusal to back down and

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<sup>100</sup> "Dinner to Generals Quitman and Shields," *The National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), cited in *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), 13 January 1848, 1.

<sup>101</sup> See Chapter I.

accept peace with an army that had all but overrun its core provinces was dismissed as mere egotism. What to Mexicans was a point of honor was written off by Americans as "the obstinacy, the vanity, the pride, [and] the self-conceit of the Spaniards in exaggeration."<sup>102</sup> Mexican ego was totally groundless, and Americans had nothing to fear.<sup>103</sup> Colonel Albert C. Ramsey assured the readers of his article that, in Mexico, "patriotism and integrity were no more, its forms only observed... These fine phrases have descended to them like the armor of Alvarado, to be admired and exhibited to strangers, but... [useless] in a battle with our troops."<sup>104</sup>

The apparent docility of the populace in territories under American control seemed to be proof that Mexican national pride was empty rhetoric. Mexicans ostensibly felt resigned to the American presence, and life went on undisturbed.<sup>105</sup> According to an article distributed by *The American Star*, the American newspaper established in Mexico City for the occupying forces, many Mexicans had even become accustomed

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<sup>102</sup> "What Is to Be Done?" *The Philadelphia Ledger*, cited in *The Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH) 14 October 1847, 2.

<sup>103</sup> "The people of Mexico are infinitely less capable of such energetic patriotism [than Americans], and have few inducements to make the effort." "Interesting from the War Quarter Affairs at Jalapa," *The New York Herald*, 3 January 1848, 1.

<sup>104</sup> Col. Albert C. Ramsey, "Field Notes. Statistics, Observations, and Thoughts on the Civil Condition of Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 14 February 1848, 1.

<sup>105</sup> "The position of the people here is a singular one; it exhibits an anomaly, such as the world never saw before. With their conquerors in the high seats of power, filling the capital with the echo of their military parade, they move on their course of life, as if nothing had occurred to disturb their serenity." "American and Mexican Affairs: Life in Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 10 January 1848, 1.

and attached to American control.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, Americans read in some articles that the processes through which Mexicans would be "Yankeefied" or "Yankeeised" had already begun.<sup>107</sup> That Mexicans could be a threat was unthinkable when they were apparently acclimating well to the occupation. The idea that Mexicans could and had adjusted to the American presence reinforced the innocuous Mexican image.

Visible signs of Mexicans who were alienated by the American occupation were not treated seriously. For instance, when Texan units garrisoned a town, their reputation for brutality strained the occupiers' relationship with the locals. But rather than acknowledge this source of tension, one author joked that when Mexican men stayed in doors for fear of the Texans, it had "a salutary effect in one respect-that of making many good husbands."<sup>108</sup> Not all Mexicans reacted quite so submissively

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<sup>106</sup> "Los Yanquies are by no means such an eye-sore to the natives as they 'used to was,' and we verily believe that many of them would contemplate the idea of our departure with feelings akin to sorrow." "Intelligence from the War Quarter Affairs in Mexico," *The American Star*, cited in *The New York Herald*, 8 January 1848, 1.

<sup>107</sup> Mexicans seemed quick to participate in American culture. One author wrote, "The city, since it has been in possession of our troops, has been, in a measure, Americanized, or rather Yankeefied." John H. Warland, Esq., No Title, *New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, NH), 23 December 1847, 1. Mexicans became intimately familiar with Americans in other ways, as well. "Officers of our army have thrown up their commissions and intermarried with the Senoritas [sic], which will have the effect to Yankeeise them and produce a Yankee population in time to come." Felix, "Affairs in Washington, Jan. 22, 1848," *The New York Herald*, 25 January 1848, 4. Another author confidently asserted that eventually "our laws and institutions, customs and manners [will] have taken firm root" in occupied Mexico, because "there is no bond of union between them and their government." "American and Mexican Affairs: Life in Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 10 January 1848, 1.

<sup>108</sup> "American and Mexican Affairs: Life in Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 10 January 1848, 1.

to the occupation, but even guerillas were belittled in the newspapers. Rather than portray them as resisters or fighting men, guerillas were labeled "rascals" whom the Americans would promptly defeat.<sup>109</sup>

It was a point of pride that the United States was benevolent to the people they conquered, but even had General Scott established an oppressive regime, some went so far as to suggest that it was simply against Mexican nature to rise up and revolt. To Colonel Ramsay, the people of Mexico had defied logic since their discovery by Europeans, when they meekly submitted to the government and religion of a few hundred armed Spaniards. Even in recent history, despite bankruptcy, unpaid armies, and prevailing "dissension and discord," the populace appeared neither to rebel nor to seek to reform the government.<sup>110</sup> In the wake of such history, that they would rise up now against the benign occupiers of the United States was unthinkable.

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<sup>109</sup> One article describes the infamous guerilla leader himself as a "rascal." "Threatening Position of Father Jarauta and his Guerillas," *The New York Herald*, 27 January 1848, 1. It was America's obligation to purge Mexico of the "lazy" and the "rascals." "What Is to Be Done?" *The Philadelphia Ledger*, cited in *The Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH) 14 October 1847, 2. This would not be a problem, as "the guerrillas on every part of this line are... most effectually cut up." "Interesting from the War Quarter Affairs at Jalapa," *The New York Herald*, 3 January 1848, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Mexico was an anomalous place where "armies mustering hundreds of thousands have been routed by five hundred under Cortez; where a united and happy nation has been subdued; ...where dissension and discord prevail without affecting the form of government; where religion has been established by the sword; where anarchy... is recognized as public law; and where the assertion that the worst of governments is better than none, has found answer; where the nation is bankrupt without a political dissolution, an army unpaid without revolt..." Col. Albert C. Ramsey, "Field Notes. Statistics, Observations, and Thoughts on the Civil Condition of Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 14 February 1848, 1.

Whig politicians also made Mexicans seem less threatening by depicting them as helpless victims, but this motif was downplayed in Whig-leaning periodicals.<sup>111</sup> Whig newspapers single-mindedly concentrated on the injustice of the war in light of Christian values and standards for civilized conduct on the international stage. Nonetheless, when they occasionally confronted Democratic contentions containing common perceptions of Mexico, Whig authors did not object to the stereotypes. Observe what the writer took exception to when challenging this argument put forward in *The New York Evening Post*:

'Now in this contest it appears to us very clear that the incompetency and utter inability of Mexico to maintain an independent existence-a decent existence as an independent power-have been made most manifestly apparent.' Could not Bonaparte have said the same after visiting the little republic of St. Marino? But did he therefore extinguish it?<sup>112</sup>

The Whig author challenged the sufficiency of the Democrat's justification for annexation. He did not deny this scathing interpretation of Mexico; indeed, his statement could even be construed as likening Mexico's defense capability to that of St. Marino. But for him, Mexican failings did not justify annexation.

Periodicals demonstrated a strong conviction that Mexico was no threat to the occupation, which, if true, had obvious, practical implications about the feasibility of American designs in that country.

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<sup>111</sup> See Chapter I.

<sup>112</sup> No Title, *Berkshire County Whig* (Pittsfield, MA), 6 January 1848, 2.

Indeed, they fixed American perceptions to regard Mexico as incapable of resistance. In contrast to the gallantry exhibited by American soldiers, Mexican behavior seemed like a dramatic counterpoint. American spirit came across as stronger. And trivializing present tensions between the occupiers and the Mexican populace set a precedent of downplaying opposition, causing this gap in gallantry to be impossible to bridge. America seemed capable of exercising its will over Mexico for as long as it occupied the country.

### **American Superiority**

In addition to the battlefield news and political commentary that exhibited evidence of American gallantry and Mexican weakness, periodicals published articles that gave Americans a better understanding of the people with whom they were engaged in war. The popular perception, which Congressmen were not shy about expressing, was that Mexicans could best be characterized as a people inferior to Americans.<sup>113</sup> Such an image held great bearing on American capability in Mexico. Newspapers advanced this conviction by emphasizing the disparity in civilized behavior between the two cultures, and by stating quite bluntly that Americans were, in fact, superior.

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<sup>113</sup> See Chapter I.

The obvious dissimilarities between the United States and Mexico were a subject of fascination and an inspiration to many authors. According to one writer, "That country is so strange in all things, that whatever is correctly written concerning it, must be equally so, and no less true. If it bore any resemblance to our own happy country, my pencil would neither attempt to pourtray [sic] any peculiarity of its features, nor any portion of its picture."<sup>114</sup>

A number of authors wrote about these peculiarities to illustrate the cultural background of the people whose country the United States occupied. Some avoided judgment, though the facts themselves suggested a lack of sophistication. An article elaborating on the *leperos*, the urban poor of Mexico, did not suggest that these people were indicative of Mexican society as a whole; they were actually equated with counterparts in Italy and the United States. However, their number, "excesses," and "brutal and ignorant character" certainly cast aspersions on Mexican society.<sup>115</sup>

Nor did all authors make any effort to be tactful. *The Berkshire County Whig* and *The New York Herald* both ran articles depicting how Mexican milk sellers took their livestock door to door, milking them to order. The *Whig* article treated the custom as interesting trivia and

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<sup>114</sup> Col. Albert C. Ramsey, "Field Notes. Statistics, Observations, and Thoughts on the Civil Condition of Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 14 February 1848, 1.

<sup>115</sup> "The Leperos," *The Semi-Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, VT), 26 October 1847, 3.

allowed the facts to speak for themselves, subtly reinforcing the image of Mexico as a primitive culture.<sup>116</sup> But the author of the *Herald* piece presumed that this practice was done for fear of theft, and he proceeded to condemn the “natural villany [sic] of the people and their distrust of each other.”<sup>117</sup>

This emphasis on difference naturally compelled Americans to compare the two cultures.<sup>118</sup> When they looked to periodicals as sources, they based their comparisons on evidence that could engender only one logical conclusion. Newspaper articles reflected common stereotypes of an uncivilized Mexico and an enlightened United States, so one could only conclude that America was a superior nation.

Some authors insinuated that Mexican culture was primitive and unsophisticated, but others were far more direct. The “ignorant, besotted and abject race” of Mexico was a prime target of merciless criticism.<sup>119</sup> An author for the *Berkshire County Whig* likened Mexicans to the “ignorant... Tartars” of Russia.<sup>120</sup> In *The New York Herald*, the language

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<sup>116</sup> Particularly in light of spectacular American innovations in steam-driven transportation. No Title, *The Berkshire County Whig* (Pittsfield MA), 3 February 1848, 2.

<sup>117</sup> “Interesting from the War Quarter Affairs at Jalapa,” *The New York Herald*, 3 January 1848, 1.

<sup>118</sup> Doing so was an ordinary reaction. “How often... have I contrasted the condition of the half-clad and wretched looking tenants of the thatched and mud-built huts, ...with that of the farmers of New England. Heavens! What a difference!” John H. Warland, Esq., No Title, *The New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, NH), 23 December 1847, 1.

<sup>119</sup> John H Warland, Esq., No Title, *The New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, NH), 23 December 1847, 1. “We may impeach and disparage the Mexicans as we will...” No title, *Berkshire County Whig* (Pittsfield, MA), 3 February 1848, 2.

<sup>120</sup> No title, *Berkshire County Whig* (Pittsfield, MA), 3 February 1848, 2.



used to depict the Mexican reaction to Americans sounded not unlike the first exposure of a tribe deep in Africa to Europeans.<sup>121</sup>

Religion, as well as race, was also a regular subject of reproach. Irish and South German immigration had amplified Anti-Catholic sentiment in American society at this time. Those who held the Catholic faith were regularly construed as ignorant, while the church itself was considered corrupt and decadent.<sup>122</sup> Such attitudes were naturally echoed in the discussion of Mexico. Authors frequently condemned Mexican Catholicism as corrupt.<sup>123</sup> Some viewed the people as inherently prone to vice and thus equally at fault.<sup>124</sup> At worst, Mexican piety was considered to be so perverted as to qualify as Christianity only in name.<sup>125</sup>

Conversely, the United States was described as a paragon among nations. *The American Star* reminded its readers,

We should, one and all, regard ourselves as being, to a certain extent, representatives of free institutions and of an enlightened

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<sup>121</sup> "The Mexicans believe them [Texas Rangers] to be a sort of semi-civilized, half-man, half-devil, with a slight mixture of the lion and snapping-turtle, and have a more holy horror of them than they have of the evil saint himself." "Interesting from the War Quarter Affairs at Jalapa," *The New York Herald*, 3 January 1848, 1. The situation brought on by the American army was "no less astonishing to their unsophisticated minds than fire arms and wild horses were to their forefathers in the days of Montezuma." Mexicans are labeled a "semi-civilized race" in this article as well. Col. Albert C. Ramsey, "Field Notes. Statistics, Observations, and Thoughts on the Civil Condition of Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 14 February 1848, 1.

<sup>122</sup> Pinheiro, "Religion without Restriction," 73-74.

<sup>123</sup> Mexicans were a superstitious and despondent people under an immoral and corrupt church. Col. Albert C. Ramsey, "Field Notes. Statistics, Observations, and Thoughts on the Civil Condition of Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 14 February 1848, 1.

<sup>124</sup> "The well known Mexican character... [involved] all of the vices and none of the virtues of the Spaniards." "What Is to Be Done?" *The Philadelphia Ledger*, cited in *The Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, OH) 14 October 1847, 2.

<sup>125</sup> Mexicans were described as a "half-civilized and semi-christian people." "Highly Important-Settlement of the Mexican Question," *The New York Herald*, 8 February 1848, 2.

republicanism, and endeavor to teach, by the force of example, to our enemies, those sound principles of religion, humanity and justice, which have gained for our country the high position which it occupies amongst [sic] the most prosperous and civilized nations.<sup>126</sup>

The United States was said to boast remarkable enterprise, energy, and “some of the best and purest forms of christianity [sic].”<sup>127</sup> Some disagreed that the conduct of the United States was living up to those lofty ideals, but newspapers universally demonstrated pride for their bastion of “Christian civilization.”<sup>128</sup>

An observer who read these descriptions and sought to describe the relationship between the two cultures would presumably deduce that the United States was superior to Mexico. But in case there were any readers who had not yet made this connection, articles sympathetic to the major political factions pointed the relationship out specifically. The subject was broached in dialogue about the value of annexing of Mexico, and in arguments against Democratic stances.

A number of expansionists expounded on the merits of annexing Mexico, which were based on a fundamental belief in American superiority. From a financial perspective, pragmatists pointed out the economic boost that would ensue when “the whole of that ignorant and malignant people [would] be set to work, in a proper way, under North

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<sup>126</sup> “Intelligence from the War Quarter Affairs in Mexico,” *The American Star*, cited in *The New York Herald*, 8 January 1848, 1.

<sup>127</sup> “Highly Important-Settlement of the Mexican Question,” *The New York Herald*, 8 February 1848, 2.

<sup>128</sup> “The Progress of Christian Civilization,” *The Boston Whig*, cited in *The Emancipator* (Boston, MA), 12 May 1847, 2.

American superintendence."<sup>129</sup> From a humanitarian perspective, philanthropists insisted that it was America's duty to retain the country, because "Civilization, christianity [sic], protest against this reflux of the [Mexican] tide of barbarism and anarchy."<sup>130</sup> Annexation would thus lift Mexico out of the economic and cultural darkness and transform the nation into a functioning, profitable participant in the civilized world, under America's wing.<sup>131</sup>

Many who disputed the supposedly intrinsic value of annexing Mexico did so even though they, too, prided themselves on American superiority and held contempt for Mexican inferiority. The disagreement arose because greater emphasis was placed on the latter aspect. They saw Mexican society as so deeply corrupt that it could not possibly be redeemed, and worried about its power to subvert the United States.<sup>132</sup> One author echoed a concern of Senator Calhoun, writing, "If we annex ten millions of Mexicans to the population of our Republic, thus giving them the power to shape, by their tawny Representatives in our National

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<sup>129</sup> "Rumors of Peace with Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 22 January 1848, 2.

<sup>130</sup> No Title, *The New York Evening Post*, cited in *Berkshire County Whig*, 6 January 1848, 2.

<sup>131</sup> "Since that country [Mexico] became independent, it has shown nothing but symptoms of returning barbarism, anarchy, and a gross savage state. The American conquest, with all the lights and improvements, both religious and scientific, of the present age, will communicate to the Mexican people a new energy and a new life, which in twenty years will change the nature of the country, and assimilate its people to a christian [sic] and enlightened age." "Highly Important-Settlement of the Mexican Question," *The New York Herald*, 8 February 1848, 2.

<sup>132</sup> "It is now the fashion, when speaking of the final annexation of Mexico, to descant upon the blessings to be conferred upon her, by raising her from the depths of degradation and ignorance to an equality with ourselves in civilization... This is all wrong and unwise, because it is wrong." Galviensis, "Mr. Baldwin's Resolution – The Territorial Question – News from Mexico," *The New York Herald*, 27 January 1848, 4.

Legislature, the policy of our country, will it be the most proper to say that we have conquered Mexico,-or that we have been conquered by her?"<sup>133</sup> It was not worth risking the preservation of great American institutions and values by exposing them to the benighted Mexican people.

And, once again, Whig authors overtly avoided challenging such common perceptions when disputing Democratic stances. Disagreeing with the contention that Mexican inferiority partly justified the war, one author wrote, "We do not care whether the inhabitants of Mexico are Spanish or Hottentots, whether they are white or black; one thing only we wish to know, and that is-has the United States acknowledged the *nationality* of Mexico?"<sup>134</sup> In other words, as far as he was concerned, racial status held no bearing on the right to self-rule. Another author openly accepted the idea of Mexican inferiority and incorporated it into his argument, warning the United States to "flee from Mexico for our salvation, as Lot did from Sodom," lest this country descend into the same "mongrel, barbarous state."<sup>135</sup>

Given the way differences between American and Mexican culture, both factual and perceived, were characterized, Americans inevitably decided that their society was significantly superior. Of course,

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<sup>133</sup> No title, *Louisville Journal*, cited in *The New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, NH), 2 December 1847, 2.

<sup>134</sup> "Mexican Aborigines," *The Constitution* (Middletown, CT) 5 January 1848, 2.

<sup>135</sup> No Title, *Berkshire County Whig* (Pittsfield, MA), 6 January 1848.

opinions about Mexican vice and barbarity and about American sophistication only directly commented on culture. Alone, each had no bearing on countries' power and capability. However, once the unequal relationship between the two countries was established regarding culture, it had implications across the board. If America was greater than Mexico in one realm, why not so in another? Battlefield successes and the progress of the occupation already seemed to verify that the American spirit was stronger than that of its enemy. Each confirmation of American superiority did much to bolster confidence in any American endeavor against Mexico, including the question of whether annexation of its extensive territories was something that the United States could accomplish.

### **Conclusion**

Through newspaper articles, common perceptions about the United States and Mexico became evident, which gave good cause to be confident about America's capabilities in that country. Americans were depicted as civilized, spirited, and strong people. They came across as a vivid counterpoint to the allegedly weak, unsophisticated, and inferior Mexican populace.

American fortitude was seen as beyond doubt. The combat record, which was regularly covered in the media, spoke for itself.

However, the extent of American strength was not necessarily limited to conventional warfare. The rhetoric of gallantry and spirit espoused by some newspapers particularly enforced the ubiquity of American power, which might be harnessed to accomplish even the most difficult tasks.

Mexico, by comparison, seemed like innocuous or corrupt. Even Whigs, who condemned the plight of the Mexican people by American arms, did not contest that Mexico was powerless. The government exhibited unparalleled ego in its refusal to accept a peace, but the Mexican people appeared to be becoming resigned to the occupation. Indeed, Mexican history seemed to indicate that the population was inherently docile, even when under extreme duress. Those who did resist were hardly relevant threats, so the prospects for indefinite occupation seemed positive.

Apparent American cultural superiority confirmed yet another way in which the United States trumped its southern neighbor. Whether by insinuating that the United States was more civilized than Mexico, or by actually coming out and saying it, newspaper articles left no question as to which society was superior. Although this conclusion had no direct implications on American capabilities, when considered in conjunction with apparent American power and Mexican weakness, it indicated that American superiority might be true across the board. This, too,

contributed to a broad understanding of American power and its capabilities toward Mexico.

As partisan sources, newspapers reflected the content and structure of contemporary political stances. The perceptions of American strength and Mexican weakness, evidenced in periodicals, informed the positions that American politicians took, and were often fundamental to those positions. People who accepted these portrayals had every reason to believe that Mexico's fate was in America's hands, which explains why politicians did not challenge the feasibility of annexing Mexico.

Yet the contents of newspaper articles held ramifications for more than just Washington politics. The perceptions outlined in periodicals reached far beyond the political sphere. Newspapers were in touch with American society, as sources that both reflected and influenced popular ideas. Therefore, ideas that engendered confidence in America's ability to permanently dominate Mexico were spread across the country.

Affair or battle.	Date.	Forces engaged.		Number of killed.		Number of wounded.		Remarks.
		Americans, regulars & volunteers.	Mexicans.	Americans, regulars & volunteers.	Mexicans.	Americans, regulars & volunteers.	Mexicans.	
1. Detachment under Capt. Thornton, 2d dragoons, in a reconnaissance on the Rio Grande, above Fort Brown, Texas....	April 25, 1846 .....	63	200	10	unknown.	6	unknown.	
2. Detachment of Captain Walker's Texas Rangers, near Point Isabel,	April 28 .....	30	100	10	unknown.	-	unknown.	
3. Fort Brown.....	May 4 to May 9 .....	750	4,000	2	unknown.	10	unknown.	
4. Palo Alto .....	May 8 .....	2,300	6,000	4	100	42	300	
5. Resaca de la Palma .....	May 9 .....	1,700	6,500	36	200	98	400	
6. Monterey .....	Sept. 21, 22, 23. ....	6,645	10,000	120	700	368	unknown.	
7. San Pasqual, U. Cal. ....	Dec. 6 .....	110	180	19	unknown.	15	unknown.	
8. Brazito, New Mexico. ....	Dec. 25, 1847 .....	500	1,320	-	*200	7	-	*killed & wounded.
9. Los Angeles, California, ..	Jan. 8, 9 .....	500	600	1	*80	14	-	*killed & wounded.
10. La Canada, New Mex. ....	Jan. 24 .....	350	1,500	9	38	6	-	
11. M6ra, New Mexico. ....	Jan. 24 .....	-	-	1	-	3	-	
12. El Embudo .....	Jan. 29 .....	500	700	-	20	1	60	
13. Puebla de Taos .....	Feb. 4 .....	300	800	6	150	46	-	
14. Buena Vista .....	Feb. 22, 23 .....	4,750	20,000	267	*1,500	408	-	*killed & wounded.
15. Sacramento .....	Feb. 28 .....	900	4,000	-	*600	5	-	*killed & wounded.
16. Vera Cruz .....	March 11 to 29 .....	11,000	5,500	12	*500	51	-	*killed & wounded.
17. Cerro Gordo .....	April 18 .....	8,500	12,000	87	*1,200	353	-	*killed & wounded.
18. Calaboso, Cal., De Russy, ..	July 12 .....	136	1,500	15	200	13	-	
19. Contreras .....	} Aug. 19, 20 .....	8,497	32,000	164	*4,000	865	-	*killed & wounded.
20. San Antonio .....								
21. Churubusco .....	Aug. 10 to 19 .....	1,200	2,000	9	unknown.	74	unknown.	
22. On Major Lally's march, ..	Sept. 8 .....	3,251	14,000	201	*3,000	581	-	*killed & wounded.
23. Molino del Rey .....	Sept. 11, 12, 13. ....	7,180	25,000	178	unknown.	673	unknown.	
24. Chapultepec .....	Sept. 13 to Oct. 12, ..	1,400	8,000	18	unknown.	53	unknown.	
25. Attack on Puebla .....	Oct. 9 .....	1,780	4,000	14	161	11	300	
26. Huamantla .....	Oct. 12 .....	3,100	4,000	-	-	-	a few.	
27. Gen. Lane, Puebla .....	Oct. 19 .....	1,500	2,000	1	219	2	300	
28. Atlixco .....								
Total .....				1,077	12,866	3,669	1,360	

FIGURE 3:

This is the table of battle statistics prepared for the Senate by the Adjutant General. Senator Cass had good reason to be proud of the information depicted here. Despite regularly facing a more numerous foe, victory never escaped the American grasp. Such spectacular military success was a central part of the contemporary American understanding of the war.

Congressional Globe 87.



### CHAPTER III

#### AMERICAN SOLDIERS' PERCEPTIONS AND THE OCCUPATION OF MEXICO

Once Mexico City was in American hands and the military settled to the task of maintaining the occupation, one author asserted, "They have run over Mexico without overcoming it – They have seized a territory which they cannot keep, and charged themselves with the responsibility of a government which can offer them neither profit or [sic] advantage. They have not acquired a nation by conquering a territory."<sup>136</sup> Some may have found this argument compelling where the article was originally published, in England.<sup>137</sup> But this sobering interpretation of the limitations of the American occupation found little sympathy west of the Atlantic. As the earlier chapters have shown, commonly held stereotypes about Mexico and the United States made a convincing case that Mexico could be dominated, for better or for worse.

As testament to how entrenched this sentiment was in American society, it was held not only by those distanced from the war, but also by the fighting men who participated in the occupation. Sometimes in the

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<sup>136</sup> "The Entente Cordiale—The Policy of Europe—The Position of the United States," *The Liverpool Mercury*, cited in *The New York Herald*, 13 November 1847, 1.

<sup>137</sup> This article may also have been wishful thinking. As mentioned in Chapter I, the British were resigned to the American domination of Mexico.

face of compelling evidence to the contrary, many soldiers confirmed Mexico to be a corrupt state primarily comprised of poor, apathetic people who readily submitted to any authority, and who accepted the United States as an outstanding country whose civilized, masculine people could achieve great feats and overcome almost any obstacle. They often applied this knowledge to show that the occupation of Mexico was quite successful, and potentially practicable in the long term. Their writings gave little cause to doubt the feasibility of annexing the country.

Of course most soldiers did not concern themselves with the exact outcome of victory, so long as the honor and dignity of the United States were satisfied. The diaries, journals, letters, anecdotes, and memoirs that they left behind remind us that American soldiers were fighters, patriots, and at times tourists, but rarely politicians. They focused on the sensational and the unique, writing about battles, heroics, sights in an exotic environment, and the culture of an alien people. Their musings, based on real and invented notions of Mexican and American societies, do not shed light on all of the factors that would play a part in annexing Mexico, but they do suggest that the territory would be advantageous, the population would not react negatively, and American gallantry and ingenuity would help carry the day.

This chapter makes use of twenty sources written by soldiers in the American army who campaigned in places that were not annexed but

stood to be if the all Mexico movement had succeeded.<sup>138</sup> The sample consists of men who came from different backgrounds and who occupied different positions in the army.<sup>139</sup> However, the sources reveal remarkably common perceptions of Mexico and American capability, regardless of each soldier's circumstances.

The one exception was disagreement over the contribution of the volunteers to the occupation. A great deal of tension existed between volunteers and regulars. The government saw the need to supplement the small regular army with volunteers, but professional soldiers largely did not. Volunteers were detested for rejecting military discipline, being rowdy and stealing battlefield glory.<sup>140</sup> But there was no love lost. Volunteers saw the military establishment as undemocratic, if not tyrannical, and the professional "who follows it for a livelihood, in peace and war, in garrison and in camp, has need for only so much brains as will

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<sup>138</sup> Figure 4 on page 100 is a map of American operations in Mexico in 1847 and 1848. The largest American force of the war was under General Scott during his drive on Mexico City. While a few of the soldiers cited were involved in the earlier campaigns under General Taylor, most participated in the march along the *Camino Real* in the core of Mexico. Figure 5 on page 101 outlines Scott's route in detail.

<sup>139</sup> Soldiers cited include volunteers and regulars, a full range of officers and recruits, and Americans from across the country. Other historians have written on the relations between these groups and how they shaped unique experiences within the army. For more information on the backgrounds of soldiers who participated in the Mexican-American War, see James M. McCaffrey, *Army of Manifest Destiny* (New York: New York University Press, 1992.), 28-34. For detailed analyses of the American soldier's experience in the Mexican-American War, see McCaffrey 80-105 and Richard Bruce Winders, *Mr. Polk's Army* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 50-87.

<sup>140</sup> "I have no commiseration for the insubordinate rascals." Napoleon Jackson Tecumseh Dana, *Monterrey Is Ours!* ed. Robert Ferrell (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 87. "If the Vols. were at home we could so govern our soldiers as to check outrages now hourly committed." Anderson 112. Flush with victory, Smith was thankful that no volunteers were there to steal the regulars' glory. E. Kirby Smith, *To Mexico with Scott* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), 53.

enable him to stand erect, keep his clothing and tent clean and neat, and his arms bright."<sup>141</sup> Their accusations of one another during the invasion must therefore be taken with a grain of salt.

### **Logistics**

Before attempting to 'win the hearts and minds' of the locals and other cliché tasks that befall an army of occupation, strategists first must face the challenge of fielding and maintaining a large number of soldiers across a foreign country. Success or failure hinges on two main factors at this most basic level. The army must establish control over areas from where it can oversee the population, and it needs to keep the soldiers supplied and in good spirits. When writing about marches and the cities they occupied, soldiers showed that Mexico was a favorable environment for achieving these goals.

Large American armies marched in force across two different regions in Mexico during the war: the northern states of Coahuila and Tamaulipas including the important cities Monterrey and Tampico, and the *Camino Real* from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Both areas were difficult landscapes for an army to travel through, and staying supplied was critical. Officers who mentioned the quartermaster department in their

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<sup>141</sup> "Suffered from Tyranny practiced, had the right of American soldiers trampled on by their own officers." Thomas D. Tennery, *The Mexican War Diary of Thomas D. Tennery* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 94. George C. Furber, *The Twelve Months Volunteer* (Cincinnati: J. A. & U. P. James, 1849), 433.

accounts were disappointed by its inefficiency, and the army had to look to locals to procure provisions.<sup>142</sup> Fortunately for the Americans, according to those concerned about supplies, goods were abundant and trading was quite successful in both regions, providing both Taylor's and Scott's large forces with ample supplies to march the hefty distances from city to city.<sup>143</sup> If Mexicans hesitated to trade with the invaders, United States forces could and did exercise coercion to persuade them otherwise.<sup>144</sup> When soldiers suggested that troop movements on an invasion scale could be adequately supplied and executed, movements on a smaller occupation scale seemed quite feasible.

In an occupation, the need to travel and spread out across Mexico could be avoided because of the way soldiers understood the country to be organized. Several noted that Mexico was sparsely populated and that most Mexicans lived in cities, claims backed up by common

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<sup>142</sup> The Quartermaster's Dept. was "woefully conducted." George B. McClellan, *The Mexican War Diary of General George B. McClellan* ed. William Starr Myers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917), 19. Quartermasters failed to procure even basic traveling gear. Taylor 39-40.

<sup>143</sup> "We procured full loads for our entire train at two plantations, which could easily have furnished as much more." Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1885), 137.

Quartermasters obtained a thousand bushels of corn from locals. Dana 114. "The country people supplied us with poultry, vegetables, and fruit." Dabney Herndon Maury, *Recollections of a Virginian in the Mexican, Indian, and Civil Wars* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1894), 130. "So far we have been able to secure at high prices an abundance of grain, flour, beef, mutton, fresh pork, some coffee, sugar and salt, with common tallow candles, so that the army can be tolerably well provisioned without transporting supplies from the seaboard." Smith 154.

<sup>144</sup> "We make them bring their produce and pay them a fair price for it." Dana 120. "Our paying the Mexicans liberally for what they bring will induce them to come, our punishing those who prevent them, will show them that we know and feel our strength, and that it will be exerted when necessity demands it." Anderson 62.

descriptions of empty countryside and bustling towns.<sup>145</sup> Mountain passes in both areas of operation made Private Samuel Chamberlain write that "Mexico is made for picket duty."<sup>146</sup> The implication of these observations was that Mexico could be controlled from key cities and strategic points.<sup>147</sup> In outlining his plan for occupation while waiting for peace, General Scott put the idea into words. "Many of the States of this republic, on account of their remoteness from the common centre, sparseness of population, and inability to pay more than a trifle in the way of contributions, are not worth being occupied. Their influence on the question of peace or war is, proportionally, inconsiderable."<sup>148</sup>

The logistics of maintaining garrisons in these cities seemed, from soldiers' accounts, practical. Like early travel writers, they depicted the town and its environs, giving some idea about the supply situation they faced. In contrast to the stark countryside, Americans were impressed with the fertile, cultivated land around populated areas.<sup>149</sup> The fruits of

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<sup>145</sup> "The population was sparse." Scott 552. "Mexico sustains nearly her entire population in the towns and cities." C. Donnavan, *Adventures in Mexico* (Boston: George R. Holbrook & Co., 1848), 49.

<sup>146</sup> Samuel E. Chamberlain, *My Confession* ed. Roger Butterfield (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 98.

<sup>147</sup> Rather than "overrun the whole country, garrison every state capital, and take every considerable city," "the only practicable alternative" for controlling Mexico was to "occupy the line, or certain points in it; and also to hold, not only the line and the ports, but this capital, preserving an open communication with the gulf." Letter from Major General Quitman, 15 October 1847, *General Scott and His Staff* 103. Grant listed cities occupied by American forces that acted as points of control. Grant 171.

<sup>148</sup> Scott 565.

<sup>149</sup> Camargo was "in the midst of a fertile country." Tenney 32. Crops grew around Monterrey "in luxuriance and abundance." Smith 69. Tampico surroundings were a "garden spot." Furber 390. Around Perote, "Vast fields of maize" were "fertile and well

these surroundings could be purchased in any season at busy local markets.<sup>150</sup> In every major city Americans passed through during the war, the size of these markets and the variety and abundance of goods being sold impressed all of the soldiers who wrote of them.<sup>151</sup> One soldier succinctly recorded that throughout the campaign the army "found supplies of all descriptions" with "comparative ease."<sup>152</sup>

Soldiers reported that Mexican cities occupied by the Americans provided amenities as well as goods, keeping the occupying forces

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cultivated." William Preston, *Journal in Mexico* (Privately printed, n.d.), 20. "In, and around Jalapa everything is beautiful - really wonderfully beautiful! There can be no other place on earth more nearly approaching Paradise." Francis Collins, *Journal of Francis Collins* ed. Maria Clinton Collins (Cincinnati: The Abington Press, 1915), 64. Puebla's surroundings were a "land of plenty." Anderson 148.

<sup>150</sup> Markets had "an everlasting stock range lasting all summer and winter." Tennyson 32.

<sup>151</sup> At the market in Matamoros, "beef, mutton, eggs, and many common article were in abundance." Samuel Ryan Curtis, *Mexico Under Fire* ed. Joseph E. Chance (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1994), 28. At Matamoros, Mexicans engaged in "considerable marketing." Dana 82. Camargo's market had many different crops "in abundance." Tennyson 32. "We have exposed in the markets here [Monterrey] the fruits and productions here of all climes." Smith 69. At Tampico, "the market is very good-an abundant supply of everything, and at very reasonable rates." Later he took his wife on a virtual walk, describing the market's abundance in great detail. Anderson 14, 59-62. Furber, too, was compelled to give a virtual tour of the bustling marketplace at Tampico, providing an exhaustive list of the variety of foods sold. Furber 405. Tampico's market, "like all Mexican markets, presents a very busy and animated picture; game, fish, fruit, and vegetables were the principal commodities in the market... and these were all remarkably cheap..." *Autobiography of an English Soldier in the United States Army* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1853), 134. Despite the blockade of Mexican ports, the market at Zacatecas remained "well supplied with every variety of foreign goods." Donnavan 54. Anderson could obtain ample goods from Vera Cruz, although the lengthy siege had driven up prices significantly. Anderson 119. Marketers in Jalapa traded many types of goods in the large plaza at the center of town. *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 210. Jalapa's market sold a wide range of goods from all climate zones. Furber 606-7. Amazoque's market featured a "great variety" of goods. Smith 162. Anderson found Puebla's "marketing abundant and reasonable," and described the market scene thoroughly. Anderson 178, 203-5. Puebla's market was "admirable," according to Smith, who asserted that "anything can be obtained here for money." Smith 168. Commodities of all sorts could be found in the markets at the City of Mexico, where "the supply is most abundant." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 275.

<sup>152</sup> *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 211.

happy. "Here we were furnished with every comfort, every convenience, that soldiers in a foreign land could expect or ask for," wrote a soldier during his stay in Tampico.<sup>153</sup> Festivities like *fandangos* were frequent and popular events among the men, although officers often disapproved of the revelry that ensued.<sup>154</sup> Both local theaters and newly established American theaters catered to large audiences in major Mexican cities.<sup>155</sup> Soldiers stationed in Mexico City could even frequent the nearby "resort town" of St. Augustine.<sup>156</sup> George McClellan, better known for his exploits in the Civil War, wrote that in Tampico he spent "some of the happiest hours of my life."<sup>157</sup> Even during wartime, in a place far away from home, soldiers who participated in the occupation could relax and enjoy themselves, ostensibly decreasing the risk of desertion and facilitating a lengthy occupation.

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<sup>153</sup> Furber 393.

<sup>154</sup> "The Fandango was all fun and frolic... [and we were] all pretty well intoxicated with love and liquor." Chamberlain 45. A *fandango* had no quality entertainment, and was just an excuse for lots of people to gather and revel. Donnavan 17. *Fandangos* "have but one object in view, and that enjoyment." L. A. Norton, *Life and Adventures of Col. L. A. Norton* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press Publishing House, 1887), 115. Officers instead went to "respectable balls," though like enlisted men at *fandangos*, some "made a regular frolic of it... and all got high." Dana 179.

<sup>155</sup> At Tampico were "a company of American actors, engaged in carrying on the 'American Theatre;' and pretty well they do also, and obtain each night crowded houses." Furber 413. "A company of theatrical performers, who had been with General Taylor's army in Monterey [sic] and Matamoras, [had]... officers and soldiers crowding the theatre every night to overflowing." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 140. "What do you think of an American Theatrical Company opening in the City of Puebla!!" Anderson 202. The *Teatro de Santa Anna* in Mexico City became the National Theatre and drew large American audiences. J. M. Wynkoop ed., *Anecdotes and Incidents* (Pittsburgh, 1848), 19.

<sup>156</sup> Collins 91.

<sup>157</sup> McClellan 51.



Soldiers' portrayals of logistics were both expressions of American confidence and justifiable conclusions derived from experiences and insight. On one hand, given the concentration of population, the cities that American forces occupied probably were effective control nexuses that allowed American forces to oversee strategically important regions. Most Americans' descriptions of markets and amenities may have only partially described the supply situation, omitting issues of supply lines, military equipment, manpower and desertion, but these were the concerns of strategists, not ordinary soldiers. On the other hand, it is telling that soldiers did not worry about the logistics of occupying Mexico, which to the layman might seem to be a monumental task. There is no question that their portrayal of logistics played into the overall positive analysis of the occupation.

### **The Mexican Response to Occupation**

Captain Anderson warned of a potential obstacle to occupying Mexico in a letter to his wife. He wrote that if the Mexican people became incensed at the American presence, "hence would result an enthusiasm which would render the country unconquerable. Every City and Town might then fall before the force of our Arms, and still we would meet with enemies in every mountain recess, and behind every burn." He went on to explain that this would not happen due to the beneficent

occupation policies of the United States.<sup>158</sup> Nonetheless, by just admitting the possibility of Mexican unrest, Anderson demonstrated superior insight over many of his peers. Unlike most Americans, Anderson had traveled in Latin America before and was less apt to accept common stereotypes about the people.<sup>159</sup> Most American soldiers believed that Mexicans were a cowardly, lazy race, and sometimes depicted them as less than human. It followed that such a people would not react aggressively to occupation, and that was indeed how locals were portrayed as American forces marched into Mexican cities.

It is not astonishing that Mexico and the United States did not have a friendly cultural exchange in the middle of hostilities. However, wartime animosity only partly fueled a stereotype which drew on deep racial and religious divides between Anglo-Saxons and *mestizos*. On the battlefield, Mexican soldiers were seen as inferior to and less masculine than their opponents from the north.<sup>160</sup> They were not even "half the men the American soldiers are," one soldier proclaimed to his wife.<sup>161</sup> Battle after battle, American forces racked up victories despite usually facing a

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<sup>158</sup> Anderson 24.

<sup>159</sup> Captain Anderson mentioned in passing having witnessed holiday ceremonies in Bogotá before the war. Anderson 197.

<sup>160</sup> "Cowardly as they [Mexicans] universally are..." Donnavan 24. Mexican soldiers were "poor miserable cowards." Dana 128. A battle loomed ahead, "but we had strong ground for hope in the positive cowardice of the Mexicans, our own comparative courage, and the superior skill of General Scott." "The Mexican lancers exhibited most characteristically both their cowardice and cruelty of disposition." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 185, 258.

<sup>161</sup> Dana 129.

numerically superior opponent in difficult terrain. Mexican cowardice was not only verified by these outcomes but, as Lieutenant General Franklin Pierce insisted, critical to them.<sup>162</sup>

Racist sentiment was even more evident when American soldiers discussed Mexicans as people rather than as fighters. Several openly condemned Mexicans as "the laziest people in existence" or as "ignorant, indolent, inefficient creatures."<sup>163</sup> Others who were less hostile merely lamented the miserable state of Mexicans, whose lot was worse than that of slaves.<sup>164</sup> Some soldiers thought that this degraded existence indicated that Mexicans were subhuman, and portrayed them as primitive and even animalistic.<sup>165</sup>

The Mexicans whom American soldiers depicted were not the sort to stand up to an American occupation. Even if the Mexican race was not inherently dull and apathetic, centuries under the foot of the Catholic

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<sup>162</sup> Musing over how his men had taken a defensible position with only light casualties, Lieutenant General Franklin Pierce wrote, "Had they [the Mexican force] possessed courage and skill in these of arms, our loss must have been very great." Letter from Franklin Pierce, n.d., *General Scott and His Staff* 141.

<sup>163</sup> McClellan 11-12, Donnavan 24.

<sup>164</sup> Preston graphically portrayed Mexicans as utterly wretched and pathetic "inmates" of hell. Preston 37-8. "The common laborers of the Country are slaves more lost in every point of view than our negroes." Anderson 270. A Tennessee man meticulously outlined seven reasons why a peon was worse off than a slave. Furber 606. Both were clearly commenting on the issue of slavery as much as the plight of Mexicans, but their comments remain valuable descriptions of the perceived Mexican standard of living.

<sup>165</sup> This soldier suggested that Mexicans could not comprehend the idea of foreigners, thinking Americans were "strange, wild-looking, hairy faced savages of the half horse and half alligator breed." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 138. Primitive Mexicans were portrayed as awestruck at the steamer *Ontario*, fearing it was alive and might annihilate them. Donnavan 16. "The inhabitants [were] little above savages." Tenny 37. "Five, out of its seven millions of inhabitants, are beasts of burden, with as little of intellect as the asses whose burdens they share." Letter from Major General Quitman, 15 October 1847, *General Scott and His Staff* (102-5).

Church and Spanish dons meant to Americans that society had acclimated to despotic conditions.<sup>166</sup> Who held the authority did not matter. A volunteer frankly asserted, "I believe the majority are alike indifferent whether the Great Mogul or James K. Polk rules over them, provided they can sell their grapes, peaches, corn and red peppers, and smoke their segars [sic] in peace."<sup>167</sup>

It is an unsurprising coincidence, then, that American soldiers' accounts did not depict an aggressive or lasting negative local reaction when they first entered Mexican cities. Some described the population as outright welcoming. The Mexicans that Americans encountered were "exceedingly polite and accommodating," and "fraternized with the 'Yankees' in the pleasantest manner."<sup>168</sup> On the road to Mexico City, Jalapans were "hospitable" and "friendly to the Americans."<sup>169</sup> Pueblans turned out on the streets and in and upon the houses like a "New York crowd on some celebration day - turning the New Yorkers into some resemblance to Florida Indians."<sup>170</sup> Americans were received into Mexico City so joyously, wrote one soldier, that he felt like they were being

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<sup>166</sup> Mexicans "have for three hundred years depended on a monarchical and despotic government." Donnavan 62. "They bend their necks to the yoke of the Spanish dons, without thinking of their miserably degraded state. It will take a century to rouse them from their torpor and to make them feel that they are free." Anderson 270. Mexicans still worshiped even though "charity is reserved for the priest and is not to be bestowed on suffering humanity." Preston 37. "The millions are steeped in ignorance, vice, and poverty, abject to the priests and trampled to the dust by the wealthy." Smith 154.

<sup>167</sup> Account of an unnamed volunteer, *General Scott and His Staff* 176.

<sup>168</sup> Furber 404, Grant 118.

<sup>169</sup> Donnavan 101, *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 205.

<sup>170</sup> Anderson 174.

welcomed home; an odd welcome considering that a day-long shootout with snipers began shortly thereafter.<sup>171</sup> Zacatecas, a city that remained in Mexican control throughout the war, even had a sizeable group who eagerly anticipated the arrival of American forces, according to a prisoner of war held there.<sup>172</sup>

Some descriptions in other accounts or of different cities portrayed a simply passive Mexican population. Several soldiers were struck by how apathetic civilians were about the war, offering no resistance to the American invasion.<sup>173</sup> When the soldiers came, citizens in Tampico, Jalapa, Camargo, and Amazoque seemed to carry on with their lives as usual, not welcoming nor reviling the Americans.<sup>174</sup> If anyone had cause for anger at the United States military, it was the citizens of Vera Cruz, who endured a long bombardment and were refused by General Scott an

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<sup>171</sup> "As the Mexicans marched out on one side of the city, we marched in from the other, and from the evidence of joy at meeting us, I could not help thinking that they thought we must have been there before. White flags were waving from every window, and every balcony was crowded with ladies, all welcoming us and waving their white handkerchiefs at us." Norton 173-4.

<sup>172</sup> "A peace party, numbering among its members many native citizens of influence and wealth... was awaiting with much anxiety the appearance of Gen. Taylor and his army, whose advance upon the place was then daily anticipated." Donnavan 50.

<sup>173</sup> "When we reached sight of the city [Tampico] there were Mexicans enough gathered on the landing to have driven us back with clubs and stones, if they had had the spirit to have done so, but they offered no resistance and we boldly disembarked and took the town." Collins 42. Another town was taken very easily, without resistance or disturbance. Norton 152. "The apathy in relation to the war, however, in the whole Mexican territory..." Samuel Francis Du Pont, *Official Dispatches and Letters of Rear Admiral Du Pont* (Wilmington, DE: Press of Ferris Brothers, 1883), 12.

<sup>174</sup> At Tampico, "They seem to evince no dissatisfaction at our presence." Anderson 21. Locals in Jalapa "appeared perfectly indifferent to us, manifesting neither pleasure nor sorrow at our approach." McClellan 91. "The people [of Camargo] appear quiet and inoffensive..." Curtis 126. "The inhabitants [of Amazoque] were not at all alarmed by our approach." The streets remained crowded and trade stayed in full swing. Smith 162.

opportunity to evacuate the women and children. But on survivors' faces, wrote Captain Anderson, "the countenance bore more of sadness and sorrow than of anger."<sup>175</sup>

Those who did not initially welcome or tolerate the Americans were characterized as being understandably fearful of the invading army. Some citizens in Tampico, Marin, Cerralvo, Puebla, and Mexico City shut themselves up in their homes or fled to the countryside, but once these people discovered that they had nothing to fear from American soldiers, they too seemed to come around and accept the army's presence.<sup>176</sup> Just days after the chaotic combat in Mexico City, General Scott optimistically reported that, "families are now generally returning; business of every kind has been resumed, and the city is already tranquil and cheerful, under the admirable conduct (with exceptions very few and trifling) of our gallant troops."<sup>177</sup> No matter which way the soldiers wrote that they were received, Mexican civilians seemed to cause little trouble for the occupying forces.

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<sup>175</sup> Anderson 103.

<sup>176</sup> Some in Tampico "shut themselves up in their houses as if in a state of siege," but not long afterward the city became "bustling and animated." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 138-9. "Both this place [Marin] and Cerralvo were nearly deserted, and men, women and children were seen running and scattered over the hills as we approached; but when the people returned they found all their abandoned property safe, which must have given them a favorable opinion of Los Grengos - 'the Yankees.'" Grant 107. "The inhabitants [of Puebla] are fast losing their false impressions and becoming reconciled to us." Smith 168. "The people [of Mexico City] began to make their appearance upon the streets without fear of the invaders." Grant 164.

<sup>177</sup> Winfield Scott, report on operations after the battle of Molina del Rey, *General Scott and His Staff* 67.

Ordinary Mexicans left behind too little evidence to gauge exactly how accepting they were of the occupation, but American soldiers' accounts of the population's response fitted too conveniently with their racist views of Mexicans to be taken as gospel. It is difficult to believe that some of the Mexican populace did not feel some sense of nationalism and react angrily to their country's occupation by *gringos*.<sup>178</sup> However, soldiers were convinced that they had accurately appraised the population's inherent racial and social traits. Although some tentatively questioned portions of widely held stereotypes, none disagreed that they held elements of truth and that Mexicans were, on the whole, a submissive people.<sup>179</sup> As a result, American soldiers were confident that Mexicans would provide little resistance to the occupation.

### **American Conduct**

General Scott's "very few and trifling" exceptions betrayed a flaw in the otherwise sparkling American conduct in Mexico City: the behavior of volunteers. Washington deemed the United States Army in 1846 to be

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<sup>178</sup> The snipers who targeted American troops parading through Mexico City seem like glaring examples of this attitude, though Americans did not consider them representative of the townspeople as a whole. Grant described the shootings as "the hostile acts of liberated convicts." Grant 163. Norton neglected to mention the firefight altogether in his description of entering the city. Norton 174.

<sup>179</sup> Furber qualified the stereotype that Mexicans were stupid by writing, "Mexican children are always more precocious and brighter than those of our country at the same age. One is astonished at the genius and talent exhibited by the boys at from eight to fourteen years of age; but at that age they become dull and stupid, and so afterward continue." Furber 609. The stereotype of Mexican idleness applied to men, but "any person who thinks the Mexicans cannot be industrious should see these girls washing in Jalapa." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 208.

unable to adequately prosecute the war alone, so President Polk appealed to the states to create volunteer regiments to fill the ranks. General Taylor perceptively noted, "Volunteers were never intended to invad [sic] or carry on war out of the limits of their own country, but should be used, as the constitution intended they should be for enforcing the execution of the laws; & repelling invasion, for which they are admirably suited."<sup>180</sup> What these men had in patriotism and courage, professional soldiers and volunteers alike knew they lacked in orderly conduct in a foreign country. Volunteers admitted their undisciplined behavior, but rather than consider its implications on the occupation, they emphasized its importance to being a good American. Regulars, not to pass up an opportunity to criticize their more publicized and popular comrades-in-arms, freely condemned the volunteers for their gross misconduct. Yet the professional soldiers also downplayed its harm to the occupation, by putting the problem in the context of the Mexican experience and portraying it as something that could be overcome. On the whole, regulars and volunteers agreed that the American occupation provided a level of justice, stability, and protection that had been unknown under the Mexican government.

According to the regulars, the "*malditos volunteros*" gained quite a reputation in Mexico and were "objects of special detestation" among

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<sup>180</sup> Taylor 51.



the people.<sup>181</sup> The Mexicans knew their arrival meant trouble.<sup>182</sup> While occupying towns, volunteers behaved "in a most shameful and disgraceful manner" by gambling, drinking, vandalizing, and being noisy and rowdy.<sup>183</sup> Guards had to be stationed with fixed bayonets at "places of amusement" just to try to keep volunteers in line.<sup>184</sup> Regular soldiers reported that unruly behavior even resulted in murders. Lethal skirmishes with locals and guerillas led volunteers to commit vengeance killings among the local populace.<sup>185</sup> Some Texan volunteers gained such a reputation for brutality that one regular soldier wrote, "[the] fearful atrocities committed by them now form part of the Nursery Legends of the country."<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 138.

<sup>182</sup> "Until the Volunteers came, the citizens appeared inclined to be sociable. But now many have left, and gone into the interior." Anderson 12. People from Jalapa were "friendly to the Americans, yet dreaded the presence of a large body of volunteers in the town..." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 205. "The consequences of these things [volunteer misconduct] is a great many families have left their homes and gone into the interior and a great many more will leave. The common people are also scared and many of them have left." Dana 152.

<sup>183</sup> "The volunteers carry on in a most shameful and disgraceful manner." McClellan 18. Volunteers gambled, drank at bars, and arrested locals willy-nilly. Chamberlain 58, 75. "The Theatre is filled with noisy Volunteers some of whom are taken away from their frolics there every night and given a place on the floor of our filthy guardhouse." Anderson 46. "The wild volunteers as soon as beyond the Rio Grande, committed, with impunity, all sorts of atrocities on the persons and property of Mexicans." Scott 392.

<sup>184</sup> "At all places of amusement are found sentinels with their fixed bayonets; they are even on the ballroom floor. And this is necessary to keep our free and independent citizens in order!" Anderson 47.

<sup>185</sup> Chamberlain gave a fantastic and almost certainly exaggerated account of the 'Massacre at the Cave,' where Arkansas cavalry supposedly butchered and scalped Mexicans in retribution for a guerilla killing. Chamberlain 88. Twenty-five Louisville Legion volunteers "went out regularly to work to murder Mexicans because one of their men had been killed in a drunken outrage among the Mexicans." Dana 152. "They think nothing of robbing and killing the Mexicans." McClellan 18.

<sup>186</sup> Chamberlain 177.

Of course regulars, frustrated with the volunteer presence, had reason to exaggerate some of this unruly behavior. An officer of the Ohio Volunteers politely wrote of their prejudice that, "I have always been proud of our regular army, but there are some small minds in all places and even good men do not all seem to regard with generous equality those who have volunteered to leave their homes and business to cooperate with them."<sup>187</sup> He believed that regulars had inflated the actions of a few, because if volunteer misconduct was really so bad, most Mexicans would have scattered and Americans would be up in arms.<sup>188</sup> However these stories held some degree of truth because volunteers confirmed their own undisciplined conduct in their accounts.<sup>189</sup>

This sort of behavior contradicted the army's occupation policy, but volunteers justified their disobedience as a virtue. These citizen soldiers were "fully equal" to the regulars, but "a volunteer here, in every little matter of ceremony, will not be bound down, as a regular is obliged to be."<sup>190</sup> Not being forced to obey was essential to freedom, so choosing

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<sup>187</sup> Curtis 31-2

<sup>188</sup> "The faults of the few will attach to the entire corps." If even just ten of his men made an effort to cause trouble, "this town would be in the greatest terror. The Mexicans would scatter to the four winds, and all the Americans in town would cry out in horror, 'look at the damned volunteers, they are unfit for service.'" Curtis 92.

<sup>189</sup> Tenney confirmed volunteer rioting, drinking, revelry, and poor discipline. Tenney 18, 68, 78. A group of Arkansas volunteers proudly publicized the vengeance killings they committed. Wynkoop 91. Colonel Norton went into explicit detail about how he and a comrade enjoyed tantalizing Mexicans with coins that they had heated in a coal brazier. After getting bored of that game, they then dumped water and flour from a balcony all over the beggars that they had attracted. Norton 197-8. He also admitted that a "spirit of vandalism pervaded the army" at Mexico City. Norton 179.

<sup>190</sup> Furber 433.

whether or not to follow superior officers' orders was fundamentally American.<sup>191</sup>

Professional soldiers criticized the lack of discipline that this mentality on military obedience encouraged, but they were not worried that volunteer misconduct would compromise the occupation. Some soldiers, whose task was to fix the problem, praised the measures that the army had taken to maintain order. Units were organized to police the streets and reduce crime. On a judicial level, military tribunals were created to try and punish the soldiers who had committed transgressions. According to their accounts, both were successful in repairing the damage done to Mexicans' confidence.<sup>192</sup>

Despite the issue of discipline in the ranks, both regulars and volunteers who were inclined to write about the achievements of the occupation were convinced that the army had established excellent stability. Numerous officers reported that the Mexican people were better

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<sup>191</sup> An anecdote emerged from the war that demonstrated well how not being bound by convention had become fused with patriotism. At a show at the National Theater in Mexico City, volunteers raucously harassed the bewildered Mexican performers. When the band eventually played the United States national anthem to calm their audience down, the rowdy bunch was portrayed as American heroes. Wynkoop 19. For more discussion of how not being bound by convention and military discipline had become fused with patriotism, see Ricardo Herrera, "Self Governance and the American Citizen Soldier," *The Journal of Military History* vol. 65, no. 1 (2001), 32-33.

<sup>192</sup> "These measures [patrols] tended to assure the inhabitants of General Scott's good intentions; and in a very short time the most complete confidence was restored." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 268. "It [the tribunal system] has been admitted by all that the order worked like a charm; that it conciliated Mexicans; intimidated the vicious of the several races, and being executed with impartial rigor, gave the highest moral deportment and discipline ever known in an invading army." Scott 396. Captain Anderson portrayed his work in tribunals as helpful in resolving the issue. Anderson 300.

off under American administration than they had been under their own government, and that most of the populace appreciated the change.<sup>193</sup> Several mentioned that local Mexican leaders formally thanked American occupation officials for their efforts to establish peace and justice.<sup>194</sup> Two even suggested that Mexicans under the occupation were in some ways better off than American civilians back home!<sup>195</sup> Captain Anderson provided perspective to the issue of misconduct, writing, "I fear that there are occasional violations of Genl. Scott's orders, on the part of the Volunteers, and in a small way, on the part of the Regulars, but all these

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<sup>193</sup> "The city was well governed and the natives themselves admitted that they felt more secure in their persons and property than they did when they had the government in their own hands." Collins 43. "I think that as far as I can see the laboring Mexicans care very little about the War, and that, by a continuance of this course, after a few months they will feel more secure in their persons and property than they have ever been under their own authorities." Anderson 147-8. "Good order, or the protection of religion, persons, property, and industry were coextensive with the American rule... Mexicans had never before known equal prosperity... Intelligent Mexicans, and, indeed, the great body of the people, felt and acknowledged the happy change." Scott 580-1. "I believe a majority of the better citizens were looking forward to the occupation of the city by the American forces, as their only hope of security against the thieving propensities of the Mexican soldiery, who infested it." Donnavan 97. "In fact, under the humane policy of our commander, I question whether the great majority of the Mexican people did not regret our departure as much as they had regretted our coming. Property and person were thoroughly protected, and a market was afforded for all the products of the country such as the people had never enjoyed before." Grant 118. Honorable conduct had a noticeable effect on the Mexican public. *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 211.

<sup>194</sup> In a letter, a Mexican Prefect thanked an American Captain and praised the conduct of his men for mounting a raid on a nearby tribe of "savages" to recover animals and property plundered from local Mexicans. Jose Ignacio Arrabe to Captain Reid, 18 May 1847, *General Scott and His Staff* 185. A pair of Alcaldas "called on me and spoke of giving some kind acknowledgement of my services and kindness to the inhabitants." Curtis 206.

<sup>195</sup> "I will venture the assertion, without fear of contradiction, that, in no City of the same size, either in our own blessed Country or in any other, is private property, or are private rights, more secure and better guarded than here." Anderson 272. "It seems the rights of these Mexicans are better guaranteed than the rights of our citizens in the states would be." Curtis 32.

combined amount to much less than they have been compelled to bear from their own soldiery."<sup>196</sup>

Soldiers ignored the hypocrisy of claiming that Americans had established peace, justice and stability, while admitting that volunteers had committed actions that seriously violated each. They also downplayed the damage volunteer misconduct did to Mexican-American relations in occupied territories, evidenced by Mexican leeriness of these citizen soldiers. Instead, Americans maintained their confident assessment of the occupation by neglecting volunteer misbehavior when it was convenient to, making it seem surmountable or justifiable, and qualifying their misdeeds as somehow less egregious than those committed by the former Mexican authorities. Volunteer rowdiness was apparently just a minor blemish on a campaign that had, overall, 'won the hearts and minds' of the people.

### **Resistance**

Given the professed success of the occupation in conciliating the Mexican people, it might have seemed hard to explain the sizable guerilla movement in the countryside. American soldiers were aware of the scope of guerilla activity and of the trouble an active resistance could cause, but they were also convinced that these men were not resisters.

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<sup>196</sup> Anderson 147-8.

Instead, guerillas were roving groups of bandits with no support among upstanding Mexican citizens. The bandits were no threat to the occupation; they merely amounted to a nuisance that could be overcome.

When it became apparent that the Mexican Army could not repel the invaders, American troops heard news that Mexican authorities had taken major steps to encourage resistance.<sup>197</sup> Captain Anderson thought it unlikely that the populace would enthusiastically commence full scale guerilla warfare, but already many guerillas roamed the countryside.<sup>198</sup> Many soldiers emphasized the raiders' numbers or their threat to American communication lines.<sup>199</sup> If this constituted the core of a Mexican

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<sup>197</sup> Captain Anderson copied a printed and circulated declaration of resistance from the Mexican Congress that emphasized the people's resolve. Anderson 269. "The best informed Mexicans in this section of the country, with whom I have conversed, say there will be no peace; that eleven of the states of Mexico had united to carry on the war in the best way they could." Taylor 148-9. "Since the battle of Cerro Gordo, the Mexican Congress have passed a law making it treason for any one to propose peace, in fact, declaring perpetual war." Smith 144. "My impression is that a general order has been issued by the rebel authorities to carry on a guerilla warfare in all directions." Du Pont 223.

<sup>198</sup> "I do not believe that the Mexicans will attempt a game in which they are so certain of being the heaviest losers." Anderson 161.

<sup>199</sup> "Guerrilla bands... infest every part of the road to Vera Cruz." Anderson 314. "Small bands of robbers... infest the greater portion of the inhabited parts of this unfortunate country." "The robbers are still infesting the road between this [Monterrey] and Rio Grande." Taylor 94, 149. Along the *Camino Real*, "the whole country thereabouts was swarming with guerrillas." Norton 186. "The roads are filled with bands of robbers under the name of guerillas." Smith 153. In the countryside outside Camargo, many "straggling parties of armed Mexicans were frequently seen prowling about in that vicinity." Donnavan 25. "The highways used, or about to be used, by the American troops, being still infested in many parts by those atrocious bands called guerillas or rancheros..." Scott 574. "Frequent depredations of numerous guerilla parties upon the wagon trains of the American army, passing between Cerralvo and Monterey..." Guerrilla chief Father Jarauta's "frequent depredations upon American trains passing between Vera Cruz and the capital, has raised him to an unenviable notoriety." Wynkoop 51, 100. The Mexican leader Canales threatened lines of

resistance, one soldier worried that it "may prolong it [the war] to an almost indefinite period, unless a new degree of energy shall be infused into American forces."<sup>200</sup>

Yet the guerillas were not part of an organized opposition to the American occupation. The same soldier wrote that the Mexican government's endorsement of guerilla warfare merely gave "authority to every score of ruffians" in the country to go about "robbing and murdering indiscriminately."<sup>201</sup> Other soldiers shared this sentiment. The term *guerilla* was frequently used interchangeably with the words *robbers*, *rabble*, and *rancheros*.<sup>202</sup>

Fitting with this role as ruthless bandits, guerillas apparently had few scruples about targeting their own countrymen. Soldiers often portrayed Mexican civilians as fearful of guerilla raids.<sup>203</sup> Aside from "robbing and

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communications through guerrilla warfare. Chamberlain 218. "A train is very difficult to protect at all points from the attacks of guerrillas." Collins 68.

<sup>200</sup> Donnavan 116.

<sup>201</sup> Donnavan 116, 25.

<sup>202</sup> Outlaws certainly remained active in Mexico during the occupation, but soldiers unreasonably labeled all Mexicans who participated in irregular warfare as bandits. "It was robbed by some of the rancheros, or in other words, by some of the old established robbers, who now design legalizing their rascality by claiming to belong to the Mexican Guerrillas." Artillery 183. "Guerillars [sic] at last!" After a skirmish, Chamberlain listed the number of casualties "of the robbers." Chamberlain 220, 222. Zachary Taylor never used the word *guerilla* in his unofficial correspondence, instead calling those who engaged in that "description of warfare" "robbers." Taylor 94, 149. "The roads are filled with bands of robbers under the name of guerillas." Smith 153. "It is thought that the guerillas and rabble are in league together..." Smith 166. "They say the surrounding country is infested with robbers and guerilla bands..." Collins 67. "Those atrocious bands called *guerillas* or *rancheros*... No quarter will be given to known murderers or robbers, whether guerillas or rancheros" Scott 574-5.

<sup>203</sup> "...roaming bands of robbers, as much to be dreaded by the Mexicans as by the Americans." Norton 126. "The guerilla priest, Jarauta, ...has long been the terror of all peaceable Mexicans within his reach." Scott 567. Friendly people in Baja California

murdering their own inhabitants," guerillas were rumored to commit horrific deeds with their Mexican victims.<sup>204</sup> Private Chamberlain, who had accused Texas Rangers of major atrocities, wrote, "The guerillars [sic], if possible, were guilty of worse acts than the Rangers, and the conflict was no longer war but murder, and a disgrace to any nation calling itself Christian."<sup>205</sup>

Had the Mexican government intended the guerilla movement to form the base of a resistance, their plan apparently backfired. In the way that soldiers depicted them, guerillas could find no support among the population, and their actions sometimes even pushed Mexicans into the arms of the invaders. Continuing the theme of Mexican-American conciliation, several officers pointed out how some guerilla parties unified Americans and local Mexicans against a common enemy. Mexican authorities assisted American troops in stamping out these threats to peace and stability, and better appreciated the protection that the American occupation provided.<sup>206</sup>

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were victims of guerillas. Du Pont 36. "The roads are filled with bands of robbers under the name of guerillas, who are as ready to plunder and murder the Mexicans as they are to attack us." Smith 154. "The inhabitants of Jalapa are in a state of uneasiness and alarm. They say the surrounding country is infested with robbers and guerilla bands, and that as soon as we remove our protection from the town they will rush in and rob, pillage, and murder the inhabitants." Collins 67.

<sup>204</sup> Norton 111. Chamberlain, who could be counted on to give the most sensational account, gave graphic descriptions of guerillas blowing up victims and forcing girls to do their bidding. Chamberlain 176.

<sup>205</sup> Chamberlain 177.

<sup>206</sup> Two thousand convicts and as many guerillas (soldiers "who had disbanded themselves and thrown off their uniforms") in Mexico City were put down thanks to American troops and "the exertions of municipal authorities." At Atlixco, a city that



Guerilla activity may have been widespread, but so long as it did not indicate a potentially dangerous resistance movement, the American forces were confident that the occupation could go on unimpeded. One officer styled guerilla warfare, "a matter not likely to produce important results, except the loss here and there of valuable lives."<sup>207</sup> Army detachments guarded towns and participated in "Guerillar [sic] hunting" to limit the damage that could be done.<sup>208</sup> The conventional forces of the Mexican army were seen as the major obstacle to the American occupation, and once they had disbanded, some accounts suggested, the careful soldier had nothing to fear from unorthodox fighters like guerillas.<sup>209</sup>

Again, soldiers portrayed an aspect of the occupation in a suspiciously convenient manner. Although Mexico was well known for its banditry, it is difficult to believe that, given the broad scope of the guerilla movement, all guerillas were petty robbers. Sources from the guerillas' perspective are lacking, but the Mexican government's call to resist must

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formerly supported guerilla activity, "so much terror has been impressed upon them [the citizens]... that I am inclined to believe they will give us no more trouble." *General Scott and His Staff* 67, 135. "This is a fine state of things truly, when these people must call on a foreign invading army to protect them against their own country-men." Collins 67.

<sup>207</sup> Du Pont 223.

<sup>208</sup> Guerillas visited Puebla daily incognito, but because "our guards are so strong and our troops so well posted that they will not attempt to commit any depredations on our property or persons." Anderson 224. "Guerillar [sic] hunting" had become a phrase for finding and routing guerilla parties. Chamberlain 221.

<sup>209</sup> Captain Anderson was not afraid of the march because "I have not the least idea of seeing a soldier enemy between this and Puebla." Anderson 160. "There is no danger... I do not believe there will be any more fighting except with small parties; from what I can learn from well informed Mexicans, their army has pretty much disbanded" Taylor 146.

have been compelling motivation for the patriotic and the faithful. Americans, however, found that the stereotype of Mexican lawlessness rang true to their understanding of the country, and were quick to point to guerillas' offenses against fellow countrymen as proof that these were bands of criminals, not freedom fighters. Rabble, in turn, was something that could be dealt with, reinforcing the confident depiction of the occupation.

### **American Superiority**

The potential obstacles to occupying Mexico outlined above were portrayed by soldiers as nonexistent, unimportant, or surmountable. But if unforeseeable problems should present themselves, a sense of general American superiority encouraged faith in the United States' ability to overcome. Some conveyed their confidence through expressions of racial and cultural superiority over the Mexicans, while others highlighted American gallantry and ingenuity. These convictions combined to leave the reader feeling optimistic about the success of any American venture in Mexico.

During the war, Mexico played the role of a foil to the United States in Americans' soldiers accounts.<sup>210</sup> Thus when these authors constructed their depictions of the Mexican people, they shed light on what they

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<sup>210</sup> "The people of the two nations differ as widely as the poles, in their habits, pursuits, and conceptions of what constitutes refinement." Donovan 53.

thought Americans were by showing what Mexicans were not. Specific language was used to highlight what traits were absent: Mexicans were "not patriotic... nor generous and manly."<sup>211</sup> Neither were they "an industrious and enterprising population, such as is generally found in the towns of the United States."<sup>212</sup> What positive and productive qualities Mexicans lacked, Americans had. Some went so far as to deem it unnatural that the unworthy Mexicans inhabited the land as a race, and American superiority was most vigorously asserted by those who recommended Mexico's domination.<sup>213</sup> What obstacles could possibly hinder the American occupation when annexation was as unavoidable as "destiny?"<sup>214</sup>

Expressing cultural superiority was less sensational than declaring racial superiority, but it subtly achieved the same goal. The scenes of "utter Mexican wretchedness" that soldiers depicted would never be found in the civilized world of the United States.<sup>215</sup> But rather than

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<sup>211</sup> Collins 67.

<sup>212</sup> Donnavan 15.

<sup>213</sup> For a stable government to become established in Mexico, "the country must be inhabited by a different race of people." Tenney 37. "At some future day, when a civilized and enlightened people shall succeed the present Population..." When implies inevitability. Donnavan 31. "What a wrong and unnatural thing it is that this beautiful country should be possessed by such a worthless, idle, vicious, mongrel race." Collins 68. "If she makes the game last much longer, we will not have the Rio Grande for a boundary but the chain of mountains called Sierra del Madre." Will is a very strong word, emphasizing American capability. Dana 85.

<sup>214</sup> "I say, hold on to this country. It is its destiny. It is ours. We are compelled to this policy we cannot avoid it." Major General Quitman, 15 October 1847, *General Scott and His Staff* 103.

<sup>215</sup> At the town of Perote, "The men haunted the silent and ruinous streets with their melancholy visages, and wrapped in their dingy blankets, looking like spectres of famine;

portraying Mexican indolence, ignorance, and misery as something racially inherent, these soldiers attributed them to the oppressive Mexican government and the Catholic Church.<sup>216</sup> The American occupation was construed by some as a philanthropic opportunity for a civilized people to establish a responsible government in the backward nation.<sup>217</sup> Although they used less belligerent rhetoric, their message of American superiority over the Mexicans was the same.

The term *superiority* implies something relative, but discussions of American greatness on the battlefield needed no comparison. The successful campaign against the large, proud Mexican army was no small feat of American arms, noted several soldiers.<sup>218</sup> Components of

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no employment, or any appearance of it, nothing but dirt, indolence, hunger, and utter Mexican wretchedness, in the midst of scenes of smiling plenty." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 224. At a scene of worship, "crowds of lepers in gaudy and ragged scraps with matted hair and naked limbs; wretches in the foulest rags; mendicants and humble, half naked Indians kneel and creep on the floor." Preston 37.

<sup>216</sup> "Under the present system of religious intolerance which prevails in Mexico, it cannot be expected that the country will become progressive or prosperous." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 233. "Education would make them good citizens. Ignorance keeps them serfs." Anderson 181. "Her people [Baja Californians] have struggled against this neglect and misrule, and are very poor." Du Pont 12. "The millions are... abject to the priests and trampled to the dust by the wealthy." Smith 154.

<sup>217</sup> "The *home question* then bears upon the soul - are we to be kept here as guardians of a people who acknowledge themselves incompetent of self-government?" Anderson 331-2. "If anything can reconcile one to the injustice of carrying the war into the interior of Mexico, it would be the benefit that might possibly result, by showing the Mexicans the grievous inferiority of vigorous action which the deadening influence of this system has produced." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 233.

<sup>218</sup> "They [Mexicans] can scarcely realize their misfortune and cannot account for the best army which ever left Mexico being thus cut up by a handful of men..." Dana 69. "Here was a spectacle heretofore unheard of: A mere handful of men, entering with hostile intentions a nation of the magnitude of the Mexican Republic; they, a nation trained to arms from their infancy, boasting of their military prowess and achievements in bygone days; we, leaving a Congress behind us debating whether they would furnish us the means of subsistence or whether we should be left to our fate, and some of that Congress wishing that we might be 'welcomed by bloody hands to inhospitable graves;'

American gallantry were scattered through many soldiers' battlefield accounts, but they could all be found in Private Chamberlain's classic story of the battle of Buena Vista. Outnumbered by uncharacteristically capable Mexican foes, American forces initially endured an enormous onslaught. The tension was palpable as the Americans almost succumbed, but at the last moment they heroically rallied and carried the day.<sup>219</sup> Chamberlain's story characteristically read as if it were made for the silver screen, but even battlefield reports contained the rhetoric of heroism.<sup>220</sup> Every clash generated more stories of American gallantry of which people became "surfeited in these days of heroics."<sup>221</sup> Indeed, not-so-friendly rivalries began between regiments who fought over which had been the most gallant, according to one officer; "Such is glory!"<sup>222</sup>

Such faith in American battlefield proficiency inspired great confidence despite the odds. Independent of their criticisms of Mexican army, some American troops displayed absolute conviction in their ability

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yet we pushed on, with a force never exceeding eleven or twelve thousand men, first capturing their metropolis, then penetrating to the heart of their country." Norton 165.

<sup>219</sup> Chamberlain 119-128.

<sup>220</sup> Reports engaged in the rhetoric of heroics ranging from briefly to elaborately. According to one concise report, orders were "finely executed by this gallant army" Scott 436. General Quitman reported much more floridly, "How this gallant army of nine thousand men descended into this valley, broke through a line of almost impregnable batteries in four battles defeated an enemy of thirty-five thousand, took more than one hundred guns, and four thousand prisoners, and erected the glorious stars and stripes' on this palace, where, since the conquest of Cortez, no stranger banner had ever waved." *General Scott and His Staff* 103.

<sup>221</sup> *General Scott and His Staff* 103.

<sup>222</sup> Smith 213.

to overcome this most conventional threat to the occupation.<sup>223</sup> Guerilla parties and volunteer misconduct were also being dealt with, and twice, soldiers specifically mentioned that "Yankee ingenuity" helped surmount other major obstacles.<sup>224</sup> General Scott praised the merits of "this glorious army, which has now overcome all difficulties - distance, climate, ground, fortifications, numbers."<sup>225</sup> So successful were the Americans than some soldiers even suspected divine intervention.<sup>226</sup> The American army seemed virtually impervious to all obstacles, including those presented by the occupation. An officer summed up the situation in that context, "It appears that old Polk is really determined on swallowing Mexico without any grease [diplomacy]. If he gives us the means, we are just the boys to do it."<sup>227</sup>

### **Disease**

Any illusion of American invincibility was betrayed by the disease that ravaged troops in Mexico. Sickness was the one exception to what was commonly portrayed otherwise as a totally practicable occupation.

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<sup>223</sup> "We... feel confident of beating any Army Mexico can bring against us." Anderson 185. "No firing, men! If twenty dragoons can't whip a hundred greasers with the saber, I'll join the Doughboys, and carry a fence rail all my life." Chamberlain 63.

<sup>224</sup> Collins 79, Norton 167.

<sup>225</sup> Scott 496.

<sup>226</sup> "So constantly has victory perched on our banners under every disadvantage and with every odds against us, that we may well hope and believe that God is fighting our battles with us, or rather for us." Anderson 310. At Fort Brown, "a kind Providence protected us." Dana 67.

<sup>227</sup> Dana 102.

A number of soldiers simply could not ignore its devastating effects, leaving in their accounts sobering descriptions of scope of illness. Yet some nevertheless tried to convey a positive spin by showing scattered skepticism of disease's ubiquity and insuperability.

Soldiers proudly reported that American forces had overcome the enemy army, occupied large tracts of Mexico, and won the respect of the populace, but many also grudgingly accepted that Americans had not triumphed over illness. The heavy toll disease had exacted was apparent in the dwindling number of men fit for duty.<sup>228</sup> Hospitals were grimly depicted as filled beyond capacity with the sick.<sup>229</sup> In the face of such a powerful menace, soldiers' confidence faltered; one enlisted man suspected that the rampant illness was the work of the devil himself.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> "A great deal of sickness prevailing among the troops." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 167. "The dress parade was a mere skeleton. Not more than 1/3 of the Regiment was out. – Camp looks like a hospital so many pale and sickly faces." Curtis 34. "As an evidence of its unhealthiness, he stated that his battalion had been mustered into service on the 28th of October, 1847, four hundred nineteen strong; that in six months he had lost about two hundred men by death; that at that time he had but forty-two men for duty, the rest being in the hospital, or languishing from disease; and that from a single company, which at the time he had left the United States was ninety-seven strong, he had lost by death one captain, two lieutenants, four sergeants, four corporals and fifty-three men." Preston 22. "The numbers, among the volunteers, afflicted with the measles and mumps, in this vicinity, continue to be very great, and the erysipelas is common among all the corps." Scott 571.

<sup>229</sup> "The sick list and the hospitals were full to overcrowding." *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 233. Even when forces were stationed in town, "large and spacious" hospitals were "crowded with sick." There were not enough beds or mattresses, so many had to lay on the brick floor. Tennery 28. Volunteers crowded hospitals and "die like sheep." McClellan 20. General Taylor wrote to a doctor, "While this war lasts you may always calculate on having an overflowing hospital, made up from the sick going & returning to & from Mexico." Taylor 117.

<sup>230</sup> "The king of terrors still reigns without a rival." Tennery 33.

When illness so "severely shook the hardiest" soldiers, what could "those whose constitutions were of merely human organization" possibly do?<sup>231</sup>

There was no concerted effort to portray disease as anything less than devastating, but occasionally soldiers downplayed its severity. One way to do so was to treat illness as matter-of-fact wastage. In the brutally statistical field of logistics, death by disease became just one more factor in military strategists' calculations. One soldier was horrified by how one detached official could calmly accept an estimated ten percent casualties when, in human terms, it meant "decimating twenty-five thousand (25,000) brave fellows."<sup>232</sup> Others insisted that disease was not ubiquitous. Some regulars, quick to criticize their unprofessional comrades, suggested that volunteers were particularly susceptible or apt to claim sickness to avoid their duties.<sup>233</sup> Others suggested that certain maladies were linked to particular times, regions and environments.<sup>234</sup> It

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<sup>231</sup> *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 205.

<sup>232</sup> Preston 40.

<sup>233</sup> Volunteers did not know proper hygiene, and almost every volunteer regiment reported one third to one half their number sick. McClellan 19. A great deal of sickness and mortality immediately ensued among the volunteers. *Autobiography of an English Soldier* 205. Numerous new recruits, "after an arduous tour of duty, will be found on the sick report for some days." Anderson 122.

<sup>234</sup> "The yellow fever commences in Vera Cruz about the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, so we have five weeks for operations before a necessity will exist for our moving into the interior." Anderson 71. Countryside water was the culprit. Anderson 154. "This [the state of Tamaulipas] has the reputation of being the most sickly place in the world. Yellow fever and black vomito sweep off its hundreds yearly. The place is almost surrounded by stagnant pools and lagunas." Norton 81. Sickness could be justified because, "Probably the change of air, experienced in our coming down from the mountains so elevated, to the lower coast, has a deleterious effect upon their constitutions (sic)." Furber 425.



followed that avoiding or removing these could prevent outbreaks.<sup>235</sup> Soldiers who wrote about sickness as a story of burden and sacrifice added a positive spin to a dark situation by applying the rhetoric of American gallantry.<sup>236</sup> Captain Anderson's exercises in rationalization, perhaps to reassure his wife that he was in no danger, bordered on absurdity. He was so intent on downplaying the ravages of illness that his letters ranged from claiming reports were exaggerated to claiming Americans were acclimating.<sup>237</sup> These responses were not common, nor necessarily convincing given the confirmed dreadfulness and scope of illness in the ranks. Still, each effort helped to preserve the sense of optimism and confidence that otherwise pervaded soldiers' accounts.

### **Conclusion**

American soldiers shared a particular view of Mexico and the United States that, overall, produced a unified, confident assessment of the occupation. Strategically, the cities and mountain passes that they

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<sup>235</sup> Yankee ingenuity was also applied to the disease issue: "A rigid police has been organized, which will, if efficiently carried out, remove the exciting causes to disease before the most unhealthy part of the season begins, and it is to be sincerely hoped will tend to abate the violence of the Black Death vomite which rages here so fearfully." Collins 59.

<sup>236</sup> "That which has no remedy, however, must be borne." Collins 90. An account of a youth dying of illness in a hospital had all of the elements of courageous sacrifice and patriotic martyrdom. Furber 414.

<sup>237</sup> "I must put you on your guard about listening to or rather believing the ten thousand reports you will hear and see about the health of our troops. I find that letter writers who are with us write lies, either through ignorance, inattention, or design. I will inform you if there be any unusual degree of sickness in our Army." Anderson 113. "The whole Army seems to be *acclimating*, as the sick lists of all our commands are large-that of 'G' Co. is slowly, I hope permanently, decreasing." Anderson 218-9.

often encountered in their marches made the entire country seem like it could be held by such natural control points. Once at those points, impressive markets and sufficient trade indicated that supply was not an issue, and ample amenities meant occupation did not have to feel entirely like a tedious duty. These assessments were probably valid, but only partially explained the logistical situation in such a way as to make the occupation seem practicable.

The abject poverty many locals lived in affirmed for many soldiers the stereotype of the miserable, cowardly, lazy, and uneducated Mexican. Others saw it as a result of centuries of oppression, or some combination of the two. Both interpretations meant Mexican resistance was far-fetched, and their accounts of entering towns reflect that. The guerillas who did fight back were not resisters but pesky robbers, whom common Mexicans seemed to detest as much as Americans did. American soldiers were confident that they accurately understood Mexican people and society, causing them to reject interpretations of the situation that might make the occupation seem less feasible.

Soldiers' notions of American virtue also meant that Mexicans had no reason to resist. They were better off under the justice and stability that the United States provided, despite volunteers' transgressions. American gallantry went hand in hand with American virtue, and soldiers became convinced they could accomplish almost anything, no matter the odds.

This confidence helped erase any further doubt that the United States could successfully occupy Mexico.

The biggest perceived threat to the occupation was ironically the smallest: the microbe. On this issue, some soldiers deviated from the prevailing theme of optimism. Attempts to downplay the damage wrought by illness were less persuasive, weaker points in otherwise strong accounts. And so disease takes its place as the one exception to an otherwise universally positive appraisal of the occupation.

Soldiers' optimism in the face of such a large undertaking reflected the confidence shared by many Americans. While policies of Manifest Destiny remained open to debate, this confident ideology affected the dialogue by downplaying doubts that America could expand. Although evidence of stereotypes about American superiority and Mexican inferiority are abundant and well-documented, identifying them specifically in soldiers' accounts is useful to demonstrate how Americans arrived at their optimistic conclusions. Being confronted daily with the tasks of occupation, soldiers wrote quite elaborately about the application of their beliefs. In their stories, more clearly than in contemporary media evidence or politicians' papers, one can see the mechanics that led Americans from their understanding of Mexico and the United States in 1848 to the conclusion that the annexation of Mexico was readily possible.

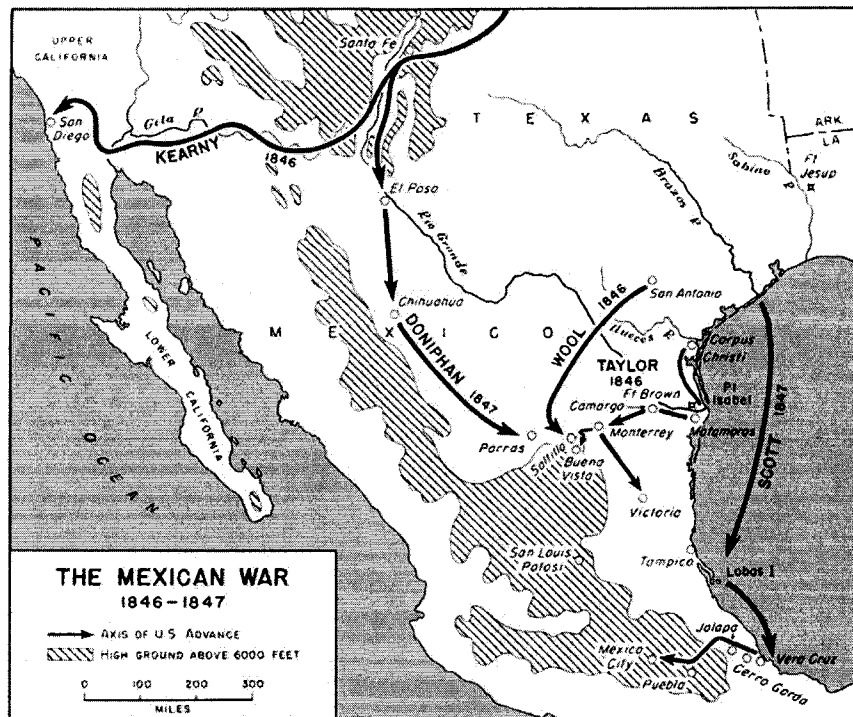


FIGURE 4:

This diagram depicts the major American operations during the Mexican-American War.

"1846-1847 - The Mexican War 1846-1847," *American Military History*, United States Army Center of Military History, 1989. Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.



FIGURE 5:

This map traces the route taken by General Scott during his advance on Mexico City. The "Camino Real," or Royal Road, was the only major access route through the mountainous terrain between Vera Cruz and Mexico City. It cut through the rugged Sierra Madre Oriental range, connecting the cities of Jalapa and Puebla along the way.

William R. Shepherd, "Campaigns of the Mexican War Inset, Route from Vera Cruz to Mexico," *Historical Atlas* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923). Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The value of annexing Mexico was a subject of intense debate in the winter of 1847-8, but America's ability to accomplish such a task was not. Americans commonly understood the United States to be superior to Mexico on multiple levels, and quite capable of projecting its power. Consequently, there was little basis on which to dispute the feasibility of annexation.

Despite disagreeing on the practicality and morality of absorbing all of Mexico, American politicians on both sides of the argument felt that if the United States committed itself to annexation, it could be done. Their debates not only failed to challenge the feasibility of all Mexico, but also exposed particular beliefs that justified American confidence.

These perceptions were displayed and elaborated on in contemporary periodicals, sources that both reflected and influenced society. Mexican society was depicted as corrupt, abject, and easily dominated, while America came across as spirited, powerful, and pointedly superior. Together, these common beliefs left no doubt that the United States could annex its southern neighbor.

Demonstrating how firmly set these general perceptions were in American society, even American soldiers who participated in the occupation held them. Themes of Mexican weakness and American strength readily appeared in their writings, even though they faced evidence to the contrary. Through this lens there was little doubt that Mexico could be dominated for the long term.

Had Nicholas Trist followed President Polk's orders and returned to his country without a peace treaty, the boundaries of the United States may well have extended much further south than the Rio Grande. By every indication, the all Mexico movement would continue to gather momentum as long as peace seemed distant. Yet Trist's successful negotiations with the Mexican government brought the movement to a sudden halt. The popular will to annex Mexico was born out of desperation for a worthy peace, and the opportunity to gain such a peace, albeit less ambitious than some had hoped, carried the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo through Washington.

When the treaty was ratified by the Senate in March 1848, the all Mexico issue became a moot point. The United States withdrew its army and confirmed Mexicans' right to a sovereign, though drastically smaller, nation of their own. However, from a historical perspective, Americans' faith in their country's capability to annex Mexico remains significant.

First, highlighting the absence of controversy over America's ability to dominate Mexico provides a better understanding of the all Mexico debate as a whole. It offers a different perspective from historians' traditional analyses of the movement's growth and decline, filling a gap in the historiography. It also clarifies the boundaries between points of controversy and subjects of agreement in a subject that is normally treated as strictly divisive.

Second, identifying the reasons why Americans did not challenge the feasibility of all Mexico illustrates important ideas that helped construct the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Racism, Anglo-Saxonism, and a general confidence in American strength were prevalent in contemporary American society. These key components of the cultural concept of Manifest Destiny conspired to depict the United States as superior and capable of dominating Mexico.



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